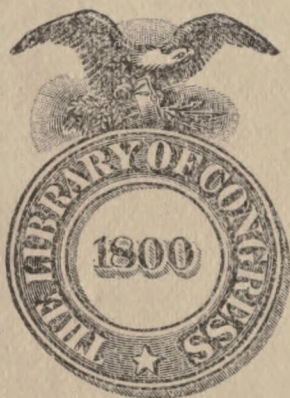


The PICTURE
on the WALL

By J. Breckenridge Ellis



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THE PICTURE ON THE WALL

BY

J. BRECKENRIDGE ELLIS

Author of

"FRAN," "LAHOMA," "HIS DEAR UNINTENDED," ETC.



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me

TO
MY MOTHER

I love the brook's vague, shadowy refrain,
The birdsongs after rain,
The shrill, glad cry when children are at play,
Doves calling down the curtain of the day,
The wind's soft footsteps in the darkening
lane.

But with one sound none other may compare
In melody of air.

Its lingering cadence, falling on the ear,
Soothes the tired brain, drives off the phantom
Fear

And leaves the benediction of a prayer.
In younger days, all Nature's sounds seemed
blent

In sure accompaniment
To high ambition's song. Then if I heard
The sea's hoarse roar or the leaves by zepher
stirred

I soared in dreams—wings to my feet
were lent.

Gone now their power that once my fancy led
To castles overhead.

But, oh, there is no change in that dear voice,
Unflawed by age, which makes my heart re-
joice

As when it sang beside my trundle-bed.

CONTENTS

Chapter		
I.	The Plotters	9
II.	The Plot	15
III.	Concealment	21
IV.	Flight	28
V.	The Escape	35
VI.	Bettie to the Rescue	42
VII.	At the Door	48
VIII.	The Claimant	52
IX.	Accepted as the Heir	60
X.	John Accounts for Himself	64
XI.	Does He Resemble the Picture?	70
XII.	Something Has Happened	80
XIII.	Safe for the Present	85
XIV.	Lucia in the Moonlight	90
XV.	The Broken Engagement	98
XVI.	Buried Treasure	103
XVII.	The Coming of Glaxton	115
XVIII.	Bettie Again to the Rescue	127
XIX.	The Jewels	138
XX.	The Polite Burglar	149
XXI.	Lucia on the River-Bluff	157
XXII.	Secrets	168
XXIII.	The Enemy's Return	175
XXIV.	Glaxton's Threat	182
XXV.	A Secret Conference	187
XXVI.	Bettie Once More to the Rescue	193
XXVII.	The Midnight Watcher	201
XXVIII.	Lucia in the Garden	209
XXIX.	Virgie Dines Out	214
XXX.	The Hidden Money-Box	229
XXXI.	Lucia on the Wagon-Bridge	240
XXXII.	By Way of Post-Script	247

THE PICTURE ON THE WALL

CHAPTER I

THE PLOTTERS

Blearstead's Eating House in Smiling Lane—one of the poorest and obscurest corners of the hilly city—had a reputation as malodorous as the neighborhood. It choked up the entrance to an alley, squat and swollen in size, with projecting props like an immense beetle that had tried to crawl down the narrow passage of mouldy bricks and greasy boarding to the open space but had got caught and couldn't stretch a leg. By midnight the habitués of the restaurant, men of rather extensive notoriety and women of slender character, had for the most part gambled, smoked and drunk their last cent and were ready to flit to goodness knows what foul nests till day-break; and by one in the morning Blearstead had turned the last fuddled wretch out of doors and bade his servitor close up for the night.

One night in early March, just as the clock struck one, a stockily-built man with the face of a bulldog—small eyes, heavy jaws, square nose—came by appointment to hear the proprietor's latest scheme of a quick cut to fortune. He was Harve Cleek, a pugilist of local renown. Of these two, Blearstead was the leader and as young John passed to and fro at his duties of clearing the various small tables it was Blearstead who, with an air of authority, opened up the new project. Drawing from

his pocket a newspaper he opened it wide marking with a crooked finger the place where a "Sunday feature story" was built around a heavily-smeared photograph like a sea of print surrounding a desert island.

"Read that!" Blearstead commanded with suppressed excitement, his tall, powerfully built frame bent over the shiny table-top, his shock of white hair quivering as in a breeze, his sunken, over-colored face writhing its nose and lips in nervous spasms that sleep alone could subdue.

With one of his most emphatic oaths, Cleek repudiated the idea of his reading the illustrated article. "I ain't come to pursoo liter'toor. If you got any inside dope on cracking a house or lifting a fat leather, my name's Cleek; but if you ain't, it's Fade Away."

These expressions did not appear singular to Blearstead, but he was irritated by opposition and his voice became a growl: "Just look at the picture, will you? I ain't asking you to use no brains. Just look at it good, then I'll tell you what to say."

All the lights had been turned out except the gasjet in the corner of their retreat, and one other across the room above the partition door through which John was bearing, with graceful ease, stacks of dishes preposterously high. Cleek held the paper under the wavering flame of the corner light, stared hard at the likeness of a man of about thirty-three, then wrinkled his snub-nose inquiringly. "I have saw it; now tell me what to say."

Blearstead slyly pointed toward his assistant just then coming in from the other room empty-handed, followed by a grotesquely exaggerated shadow. The young man was softly whistling; his eyes looked far away.

Cleek slowly nodded his bullet-head.

"Do you get me?" the other insisted.

"It's easy," Cleek affirmed, "though the guy in the picture must have been caught and took considerable older in life."

"Of course," Blearstead showed triumph, "seeing as John ain't but about twenty-one and this here was took before he was born. Now, this piece is all wrote about what happened twenty year ago," he added, keeping the sidewise movements of his nose, and the workings of his mouth steadily going, "and deals with a couple—the picture is the male of it—in the millionaire class. They lived in California same as me only they wasn't so well knowd for I'd been in the pen a time or two and my pictures everwheres, without me having to pay to get 'em on the front page."

"Well, go ahead, Old Vanity," Cleek said with surly good-nature.

"I got acquainted with their nursemaid and her and I fixed it up to kidnap the year-old baby; they was just the one kid, a boy. So we done; and things was as smooth as the sleeve-lining of a gent's overcoat, I wrote several letters to the father, and he wrote to me, we was the regular little letter-writers, back and forth we come till all was set for him to leave me my pile at a certain spot. But right there is where the cops butted in—you know how they are always messing up a fellow's plans, if they get a chance. There was nothing to do but skip for our lives. What become of the nursemaid I never knowd, but here's me, talking to you."

"Having named no names—" Cleek hinted.

"I'll name them names when you're safe in with me on this."

"What become of the kid?"

"When I see we was never to get a cent out of the kid on account of the cops making it so hot for us, I'd have left him on his pa's doorstep only I'd have got nabbed. I'm as kind hearted a man as ever lived, but I proves my kindness on myself first. We fed the baby and kept him under cover till that nursemaid got the panic in her blood. She drowned him in the river, then told me afterwards. She knowd I'd never a-stood for it."

Cleek grinned hideously. "Good thing you lost that soft heart of yourn. You wouldn't be no-count in our business if you was like you use to be."

"She told me it was soon over—a toss from the cliff, a splash, and a weight to keep the body from washing up on the beach."

"That must have been a devil of a woman." Cleek still smiled.

"Well—what would you have done in her place?"

Cleek started up, shoving the table to one side and his smile changed to a heavy-browed scowl. "What did you tell me for?" he rasped.

During the three years of their intimacy, Blearstead had found him far from scrupulous. That he should at this critical juncture show disgust for crime roused intense indignation.

"Hold on there!" Blearstead's was the sternness of the master. "You and me are a little too thick to fall out. Sit down; I've told the worst there is. Get yourself ready and I'll soon show you where you come in."

"I ain't a-riding."

"You think you ain't, but that's just because you're going so fast. This piece tells all about the abduction—hashing it up, you know, for readers of the present generation. It seems

that my man has left California—is living in this state in a one-horse village on the river off main travel. He is still hoping his son'll turn up some day, or at least that's what the reporter says. His wife's dead but his other child, a daughter, is living with him, and he still has that million or something like. He's not much past fifty, but he's lost his health complete, and looks like an old man."

"That picture of him looks like he wouldn't break early."

"Yes, but losing the kid done the trick. Cleek, if I'm any judge of life and art, this here picture looks enough like my nevvie to be him if he was older. See?"

Cleek's beetling scowl had gradually relaxed into a still more hideous grimace. It brought his features oddly up to the focus of his short square nose as if he were suddenly all pug. Shooting a stealthy glance out of the corner of his eye toward John Walters, he nodded. "I get you."

Blearstead gave his nose a mighty tweak and by the aid of his upper lip caused it to describe a complete circle. He whispered hoarsely: "I've got an old grip with all the identification things in it needed to prove the case: the baby-clothes with the initials, the shoes, the baby-spoon what the maid snaked away with him, but best of all the old man's letters to me all about my terms. Of course my name was different then, but them letters tell the whole story. He's bound to recognize his own handwriting. I don't need nothing but the kid hisself. See?"

"I ain't wall-eyed, am I?" retorted Cleek. "Call John and have it out with him right now."

Blearstead cast a brooding look toward the

erect, busy young man whose face showed no care, and whose whistling, soft but merry, indicated a joyous nature. Though his clothes were heavy and coarse there was an indefinable difference between him and the two conspirators which both felt and resented. That he should always keep himself scrupulously neat was a matter to them of no concern. He liked to be clean—well, that was all right. But the intangible something of the spirit that they could not name and realized that they lacked, brought the look of somber brooding to the uncle's gaunt eyes. He muttered, "You've got to be kinder cautious the way you handle him. But we got to handle him, in course." Then he called the young fellow from his tasks. "Here, John, we've got something up our sleeves. Listen at us."

CHAPTER II

THE PLOT

John Walters promptly responded to Blearstead's summons, traversing the long smoke-browed chamber, skillfully slipping between the little tables from which the long-used cloths had not been removed. As he drew near the corner gasjet, he noted the effect of its merciless glare on the two men projected sharply against the mellow obscurity; the huge head of his uncle with its unkempt thatch of white hair, and the brick-red face of the pugilist had never appeared more sinister. But they were factors too intimate in his daily life to call for more than an appraising glance—a recent misadventure of his own was sufficient to engage all his faculties, now that work no longer claimed his hands.

Over his delicately featured face passed an expression of swift resolution. He was a slender youth and not tall, of nervous organism, quick in all his ways, sharp and instantaneous in tones and forms of speech as if body and mind were kept wound up to highest tension. His uncle, a muscular giant nearly seven feet in height, could have overpowered him without question and he knew himself to be no match for the bully Cleek, yet he faced them with a countenance void of fear.

"Look here," he began with his customary abruptness, "I've made up my mind never to go out with you fellows again—" he met his uncle's glare determinedly—"and I won't have you telling me your schemes of robbing

houses and all that. I let myself in once for your kind of work and it's going to last me a lifetime. See? My mother raised me to be always on the square and after this I intend to stay on the square. Yes, sir, if you throw me out on the street. I'm ready to go on my own, anyhow. You might as well—"

"Oh, come off," Cleek interposed, tolerantly. "Shut off your works, boy, and take a recess with us. It's a mighty safe bet that we don't want you to go with us again on breaking a house. Lord! what did you do, last night? You gets into a bedroom where a lady is taking her repose. She looks at you modest and reproachful, and, 'Excuse me, mum,' says you, 'let me beg of you to make no noise, as you are perfectly safe,' says you. Then you asks her to let you take away from the table a book of pomes as a souvenir, which you done. And as soon as you left that bedroom, the lady lets out a yell like a Camanche. Your uncle and me nearly broke our necks getting away. Maybe you call that square, nearly putting us both in the pen. Nothing ain't any squarer to a man, than the mind he has. If you've got a square mind, you see things square, that's all."

In describing John's recent adventure as a house-breaker, Cleek kept close to the newspaper accounts as based on the statement of the lady in the bedroom which, in the main, was accurate enough. Dreadfully overwrought by her experience, the young lady had no doubt colored her story. At any rate John Walters had struck the reporters as a rich mine of romantic possibilities. No one, of course, knew his name, but no name was desired. "The Polite Burglar" was better for a headline than any name.

"We're wasting time," Blearstead growled.

"One good thing, John," Cleek persisted, "You got all the limelight. The whole city's on the search for 'The Polite Burglar' with a volyume of pomes in his pocket."

"Of course," Blearstead interposed, "we don't need argue that my nevvys a fool. It goes without saying. But this kidnapping scheme sure ought to suit him down to the ground. And he owes it to me—since he's so proud of talking about being 'square'—to make some return for all the money I've spent on him, yes, and on his ma before she died, though she was my own sister. Sister Ann never raised him right. She coddled his body and filled his brain with such thin-shelled ideas that they're all-time breaking and getting messed up in his basket. She even give him the microbe of wanting to be educated. If she hadn't died, I guess he'd be swimming over his head in books by now."

John Walters, waiting patiently for what was coming, listened with birdlike glancings of his eyes, unruffled and unafraid.

"But his ma—the only sister I ever had—died, and about that time—Cleek, you remember it—John falls off the roof and breaks his leg in two or three places. And what did I do?"

"You sure took care of me," John declared emphatically.

His patron-uncle growled, "That's what I done. And a long time before he could walk about, me feeding and clothing him, pouring out my money like water."

He addressed himself solely to Cleek, as if his nephew were a lay-figure. "Was that all? Not on your life. What does he do but break that leg over just when he was some account,

me with the doctor's bills. But it's O. K. now. Yet can I point my finger to any special act of his and show it to you and say, 'That's his gratitude'?"

John protested: "I've worked steady in your restaurant." He had always loathed the duties of Blearstead's Eating House, and looked upon himself as a model of gratitude.

"Yes, and was paid to do it," the other snapped.

"I went with you on that house-breaking job."

"You had to go. We'd a-skinned you if you'd held back."

"No money could have paid me to go, nor threats either just by themselves. I was fool enough to think I owed it to you to do as you asked."

"And a mess you made of it!"

Cleek interposed. "Everything he's picked up in the way of schooling will come in awful handy in this new deal we're passing him. Oh, boy!"

Blearstead nodded and slapped the open newspaper. "Here's the point: you're to go to this man and pass yourself off as his son that was stole from his house when he lived in California twenty year ago. You'd have did this sooner but I never knowd what had become of the man till I see this newspaper. There was some time I lay under cover and when I begun to look about, the earth seemed to have swallowed up my man. I'll give you more identification tags than half a dozen kidnapped babies would need in the parcel post. You're to live with him and be his son; see? And as he's a millionaire, you'll be kind to me and Cleek. Doctors say he ain't long for this world, and when he passes in his checks you

and his daughter will come into the grazing. There's me and Cleek once more. It's an easy job and suited to your ideas of taking things smooth. As the real son was drowned as a baby, nobody's going to bob up to get in your way. You'll be doing the old man a real kindness, and if the girl is single I reckon she'll be glad to have a good-looking brother to go about with 'er. Talk about being square. That's the squarest thing on earth to get rich off of a bundle of old letters. All you need for success is a nerve and a smile."

"If I was the right age," Cleek sighed, "the next train would see me carrying the old grip with my baby-clothes. I mightn't look as much like the millionaire did back yonder, but how does he know what his kid looks like by now? Here's me hieing out to that little town on the river. This is me talking: 'Daddy, I'm your long-lost heir-apparent, come to share your last crust. Here's my proofs in this suitcase.' Cleek flung open his arms as if to embrace a dream-figure. 'Daddy, don't you remember that mole on my left bosom?'—Say, Blearstead, was the kid marked? That might make trouble."

"Nothing was said about no birthmarks," impatiently. "Well, nevvvy, there's your deal, laid out on the table for you. Go and live in your palace. You're a rich man's son and your name is John Lyle Warring."

With no word escaping his grimly-set lips, the young man looked from one to the other with his piercing gray eyes.

Cleek said, "As you've been 'John' all your life, all you have to get used to is to come when 'Lyle Warring' is called."

Though amazed at what he had heard, John was not surprised at his uncle's audacity, for

he and Cleek would hold back from no wild scheme. But the proposition was so different from the one he had dreaded, it sounded so impossibly romantic, that he did not know what answer to make. He had not the slightest intention of yielding to the plot, but how to refuse and escape the violence of their wrath called for intense thought. For a time an uneasy silence prevailed while a black storm gathered on Blearstead's brow and Cleek's clenched fists brought out the great muscles on his bared arms. Then John braced himself for the unequal contest.

But there came a diversion. Resounding blows made the front door jump in its sockets while stern demands were heard that it be opened in the name of the law. Instantly Blearstead's face lost its look of ferocity inspired by his nephew's opposition.

"They're after you, John," he whispered, rising to his towering height. "You do as Cleek says." Then he raised his voice in a roar, "All right, I'm coming."

From the alley a voice responded: "No use to try any of your tricks, Blearstead, we've got the joint surrounded on all sides."

"All right, I'm coming," he cried as before, his heavy tread jarring the dishes in the racks, as he traversed the length of the apartment.

In the meantime, remarkably agile of movement, Cleek had stripped from half-a-dozen tables their dingy covers to cast them with artistic carelessness into the darkest corner of the room. Under the heap which looked like drifted snow stained by the dust of windy days, John flattened himself upon the floor as limp and motionless as if he were but another linen rag.

CHAPTER III

CONCEALMENT

When Blearstead opened the door there was a pause, then a rush from the alley and three policemen with their officer burst into the room as if anticipating opposition. They stopped short at sight of the peaceful interior. While his men busily searched under tables and behind stacked-up chairs, the lieutenant observed genially, "Blearstead, I'm not after you and Cleek this time though there's not a doubt you're both back of the young scamp we've come to arrest. Where's John Walters?"

Blearstead spread his arms wide. "Search me, if you think I've got 'im in my pockets."

"We ain't saw him," Cleek observed, "since closing-up time. Then we told him to hide out as Blearstead and me had business to talk over. What's the little devil been up to this time?"

The officer knew the house-breakers too well to pay the slightest heed to their words, and the house-breakers spared themselves the effort of seeming indignant over the invasion. Two patrolmen darted into the next room on a tour of inspection—only one room opened into the dining-room, since the rear was used as a kitchen—while the other opened the back door to waiting comrades. Almost at once footsteps were trampling about overhead; the bedrooms were being inspected.

In the meantime the lieutenant seated comfortably at a table with Blearstead and Cleek explained himself cheerfully: "I'm just keeping an eye on you fellows till they bring down

the boy. There were certain marks about that burglary on Troost Avenue last night that made us as morally certain it was your work as if you'd autographed it—but of course nothing moral can ever lay hold of you. No proofs; that's our weakness. But one of my men remembered your waiter and that made me remember too. The boy has always seemed straight, but of course he can't go on living with you and keep straight. We fancy he is the 'Polite Burglar.' John is very polite, and politeness is awful rare among Americans these days, particularly American burglars. It seems a pretty warm trail, though I hate to think it of John; he had a good mother. If he's innocent, nobody will be gladder. All we want is to show him to the lady he frightened half to death, and if she can't identify him we'll take up some other clue."

"I wish I could help you, I do, indeed," Cleek declared.

"All we want is to borrow John Walters for a little while. Now, look here, fellows, that's not an unreasonable request. You know you've got off easy half a dozen times and I think you ought to show you appreciation. You've broken into a dozen houses that I'm morally certain of, only, as I said, nothing moral can get you. By rights you ought to do time the rest of your lives. Yet here you are as free as air and all we ask is John."

"I ain't saying but you're a decent officer," Cleek agreed, finding that Blearstead maintained a sullen silence. "Of course you get paid to be legal while me and Blearstead has to find our own board and clothes. You know we'd give up Johnny to you if we had him," he grinned, "as innocent a babe as was ever weaned. But what you could do with him gets

my goat unless you're thinking of starting a nursery."

"We won't do a thing to disturb him, Cleek. We'll feed him on a bottle and keep him tender till we can show him to Miss Alice Klade."

"Miss Who?" growled Blearstead whose sense of humor was rudimentary.

The officer smiled. "Haven't you read about the Polite Burglar?"

Cleek turned to Blearstead. "When John went away didn't he say he wouldn't blow in till morning?"

"I never set up for him," Blearstead affirmed. "When he goes out after closing time, he knows he can't get back into the house till I'm up in the morning."

"Oh, don't worry about that," the officer murmured. "We'll stay with you till he does blow in if it's this time next week. We'll take our hot meals with you, the best you've got, and you can charge 'em up to past favors. Of course it would make it easier for you and more comfortable all around if the boy'd give himself up at once. We're bound to get him, and the longer he holds out the more guilty he's proving himself. He lived in town years before you fellows came and we never had a mark against him. As a newsboy and messenger boy and driver of an express wagon he made more friends that you've made enemies. He and his mother were known all around here and he couldn't any more hide from the law than an elephant could hide among the grassblades on a front lawn. He's circulated everywhere. He's big with notoriety; and before you took him in hand, he was all right; full of pranks, yes; but no meanness. And if he's as nice a chap as when his mother

died, he'll not object to meet Miss Klade face to face."

"I don't know," Cleek observed. "He's awful bashful with ladies."

The officer shrugged his shoulders and a dull silence settled upon them to be broken presently by the return of the police—the house had been searched in vain.

Cleek then rose. "Officer, if you've no objection, I'll go home to my pole to roost."

"Certainly. Good-night, Cleek. You'll not mind if I detail one of my men to see that you reach the coop in safety?"

Cleek grinned. "It will be an honor." When he was gone, Blearstead got up to go to bed, responding to the officer's banter only by surly glances. He strode into the adjoining room whence soon came the sound of wheels on the bare floor, explained when he reappeared, pushing an immense laundry basket on a truck.

No particular attention was paid him as he trundled the basket to the obscure corner where the soiled linen lay heaped. Bending low he gathered up John Walters' slight and supple form in its white swathings and with no perceptible effort deposited him in the bottom of the basket coiled in a limp semicircle. The truck was then pushed back into the next room and filled to the brim with cloths and napkins so loosely arranged that they permitted the fugitive plenty of air.

As this was John's first adventure of the sort, he trembled with apprehension every time the heavy tread of a policeman drew near his place of concealment. Hearing his uncle ascend to his room, he knew himself to be indeed alone with the enemy, and felt poignant regret that these men, formerly his friends, must now be classed as such. As he crouched in the bas-

ket, afraid to sleep lest heavy breathing lead to his capture, he reviewed his life to discover the point at which it had changed for the worse.

At school he had been thrown with people of stations sufficiently diverse to learn pretty accurately to measure his mother's limitations. She had been a kind and ambitious woman, bent upon raising him to the heights she was unfitted to tread, and only their grim poverty and her failing health had checked his advancement. When his uncle came evilly into their lives his mother's strength had weakened swiftly to the end. She seemed to fear her giant brother who, however, showed them nothing but kindness. After her death, John thought it providential to have a relative of means ready to give him a home. Only gradually did the knowledge come that most of Blearstead's income was independent of his restaurant. Perhaps he was not so shocked by the discovery as he should have been. Down in the slums, though one be "square," he rubs elbows so constantly with crooked lives, that their nearness blunts his sensitiveness to right and wrong.

John had at last been driven into a corner, but the expedition with Blearstead and Cleek to break into the Troost Avenue house had seemed to him an adventure unrelated to morality. Had he held back at the cost of a beating, the robbery would still have taken place, and in going he added nothing to the wrongdoing. All he had taken, and that after asking permission, was a book of poems with Alice Klade's name on the flyleaf. Yet the whole city—thus he thought of his Nemesis—was hunting him down! It would be madness ever

to show himself again on the streets—the name of John Walters must be cast aside forever.

Toward morning the air grew cold, and John shivered under his coverings. The policemen in the next room were keeping up the fire but had closed the partition-door. He could move in the basket without fear of detection but with no other outlet than the dining-room and the stairway leading to the upper corridor, the small room offered no means of escape. He wondered how long he must remain in his cramped position and what bold scheme his uncle had formed. How could Blearstead and Cleek have communicated details of a plot looking toward his freedom while the lieutenant sat with them at table? Tones of their voices, stealthy looks, hidden twitches of the hands and feet must have carried on a curious conversation while the officer was intent on other matters.

He knew when the early gray dawn began to show its cheerless presence at the skylight—this inner room had no windows. He heard his uncle's feet treading heavily overhead, then coming down the stairs. He crossed the room as if knowing nothing of the basket, and jerked open the dining-room door. John heard him asking the watchmen if his nephew had turned up. Now he was opening the street-shutters, and pushing the tables creakingly here and there. His harsh voice was talking over the telephone. John knew he was talking to Cleek. What could he say to Cleek in the presence of the police? The partition-door was slammed shut and only subdued murmurs were to be heard from the end of the dining-room where the rusty coal-stove glowed in its litter of ashes.

The cold increased; the light had not only

the fixed glare but the touch of snow. From across the narrow alley came sullen sounds from the big tenement waking in its customary bad humor to go unwillingly about its sordid tasks. Already voices were quarreling, screaming, cursing. Vendors' carts rattled past the rear of the restaurant.

But the police made no move to depart. They would wait—wait all day. Had Blearstead exhausted his inventive genius in getting John into the basket? Did he expect his nephew to steal upstairs and seek liberty down the back passage? But the back door would certainly be guarded. To remain or to attempt flight seemed equally dangerous.

CHAPTER IV

FLIGHT

Presently a wagon rattled up before the front entrance and John wondered vaguely if the police had sent for an ambulance—and if it had come for him. It seemed more likely that Cleek had in this manner responded to Blearstead's orders over the telephone, yet, if so, the policemen surely would have understood the scheme.

The partition-door opened. Blearstead tramped into the room, and began pushing the truck before him, all the time keeping up a grumbling conversation with the policemen, lowering his raucous voice as he reached the door, subduing it still more as he made his way across the front end of the dining-room to the street-door. John felt the truck's little rollers bumped over the sill to the pavement, then heard his uncle's gruff command—

“Here, you! Catch holt and give me a lift.”

He felt himself swung up into the wagon which at once rattled away over cobblestones, jolting him so violently that at first he was hardly aware of the keen fresh wind. Of course the driver was in the plot; any ordinary laundryman must have expressed astonishment at the basket's weight. But evidently the young man was not expected to jump out and flee, since the wagon maintained high speed. After various mad turnings the wagon was stopped so abruptly that he was flung against the side of his wicker cage.

“All O. K.,” sounded the voice of Cleek.

The basket was lifted down and carried away, first over bare ground where boots gritted on ashes and cinders, then across a carpetless floor. A door creaked open. Wooden steps were descended and at the bottom Cleek bade the fugitive "Come out of there."

John emerged stiff and sore but with the alert self-possession with which he was wont to face his rather difficult world. He stood in a cellar—a square dingy cave with unequal earthen floor, walls of mangy disintegrating stones, a ceiling of blackened rafters meshy with the spider-webs of other years. Bits of boards and boxes overflowing with rags and old papers were scattered about, with a pyramid of coal in a corner and a small grated window hidden by empty barrels perched upon the coal. Sufficient light peeped around the barricade and through loosened staves to cast the chamber into a brooding half-tone wherein all things were discerned but nothing clearly.

Cleek said by way of explanation, "The Smiler"—and John who knew every nook of this section of the city understood that he was in one of the underground apartments of the Smiling Lane Tenement, just across the alley from his uncle's restaurant. His long drive had been for the benefit of the police. The driver, as if his part had been thoroughly rehearsed, fastened the laundry basket to his back and without a word stamped up the steps and vanished.

"You're safe here," Cleek said with gruff friendliness, "but if you poke your nose through a crack you'll get yourself nabbed. The gang's sure hot on your trail and big headlines in this morning's paper giving a mighty good description of you and your duds. As 'The Polite Burglar' you're as famous as

a movie star and since they've found out who 'The Polite Burglar,' is, you'll never be able to show your mug in this town or claim your name anywhere else. You're dead. The only show I see for you, old fellow, is to fall for your uncle's scheme and be resurrected as the Warring heir. Go to that little river-town, about a hundred mile from here but so hid up in fields and woods that a fellow might stumble over it before he know it was there. Pass yourself off as John Lyle Warring and you're safe for life with a million dollars to line your nest with."

John perched on a box of waste-paper and crossed his legs and pursed his mouth. "I've been thinking it over, Harve. Last night was long enough for a year's thinking. But I don't know. The idea of fooling the old gent and swiping the dough I've got no right to makes me sick."

"Well, I don't think you can stay here without a doctor, either. There's nothing in that talk." Cleek moved toward the dusty stairway. "The only one who had a right to the dough is drowned, not counting the girl, and of course she'll get her share. The old man thinking he's got back his long-lost son will make his last days his best days. But maybe you think you ain't got the spirit to carry the thing off."

John laughed shortly. "Oh, I could do it all right; why, it's a cinch."

"Well, you'll either do it or get done; that's another cinch. I didn't get to talk to Bleary long enough to get all his details; he'll have to come and put you wise to them. My advice is to have your mind made up to fall for his scheme when he does come. You know Bleary's an Injun when you cross him. If you ain't

going to do as he says, better not wait here. You know you ain't in prison, but free to come and go as you see fit." With this, Cleek climbed aloft and banged the cellar-door behind him.

John was given a long time to think this over but although he had already viewed the matter from every angle in his uncomfortable night-quarters, he was sorry when the sound of his uncle's footsteps advised him that the period of reflection must end. It was mid-afternoon when Blearstead came down from the deserted room, a basket in one hand, in the other a large bundle.

"I can't stay but about five minutes," the giant said, opening the basket on an improvised table as he spoke. The hungry tenant of the cellar was treated to a sight of hot savory dishes. "Fall to," Blearstead ordered not without a human sympathy in his gruffness. "I'll say what I've got to say while you're filling."

John eagerly availed himself of the opportunity. His appetite was prodigious and while satisfying it he was saved from announcing the decision that would determine all his future. He had not yet definitely made up his mind, yet despite the sinister danger hanging over his head, and although moral scruples require a purer air for full development than can be found in the "bad lands," he could not see himself leagued with his uncle and Harve Cleek in the conspiracy. To impose upon the credulity of a helpless old man for dishonest gain struck him as abominable and the more time he had for reflection the more glaringly opposed to all his instincts it appeared. So he ate and said nothing.

"I guess it's fixed that you're to go to Lag-

ville, and that your name's John Lyle Warring—what? Lord! we're getting mighty fine names now-a-days. I've already expressed a suitcase to Lagville adressed to you under an assoomed name—here it is on this slip of paper. Just tell 'em at the office that you're this name and take the suitcase off to the woods somewheres and put on the clothes you'll find in it. But it's got more than duds. You'll find your baby-clothes and your baby-spoon and all them letters Mr. Warring wrote me about you when you was kidnapped—see? Here's the company's receipt for the suitcase." He handed over the yellow form.

"I know you wouldn't betray your poor mother's only brother, but if you do, you're a dead man—them's Cleek's words, not mine. I've knowd Cleek three year and he is certainly a man of his word. In that suitcase waiting for you yonder at Lagville you're going to find a change of clothes that the son of a railroad president might be proud to wear, all in the latest colors from shoes to derby." There was a convulsive writhing of his features and for a moment it appeared as if his nose might never get back in place.

"But in this bundle you'll find something to put on right now. I wouldn't give three cents for your chances out of the pen if you leave this hole in your own duds. And when you take off your things, bury 'em careful under the coal so they won't know you've got a new skin. When you get to Lagville, you'll have to give old man Warring some account of your life and you want to give it full and free but not so full and free as ever to get balled up when you have to go over it a second time. See? So while you're waiting for dark, better be getting your history on the brain. I don't

care what you tell 'im, just so's I'm left out. You've got some tall explaining to do. They'll want to know how you come by the letters and things. And they'll ask where the man that did the kidnapping and the housemaid—her name as knowd to them was Lizzie White—is."

John suggested, "Suppose that housemaid should show up after I'm established?" He found a definite enjoyment in picturing himself in the house of luxury; of course it was a purely imaginary and impossible picture.

"That ain't likely. But you can attend to all that. You're a scholar and can handle it out of books such as I couldn't." It had not occurred to Blearstead that the other meant to refuse and John thought grimly of the terrific struggle that must ensue should he drop hesitating words.

While he ate steadily, his uncle continued: "This is the last you'll see of me for quite a spell. When it's dark and the coast is clear, Cleek will give you a sign. Then you'll pull your freight. You can't get out of town by any of the trains, everything's being watched. Even the bridge is set for you. Famous man, you are! 'The Polite Burglar.' Now listen: Tacky Hode will be waiting to take you down river in a skiff and after that, John Lyle Warring is your name. Here's money to take a train into Lagville and after that of course your daddy'll furnish your pin-money. If they nab you before you get to the river, of course the Warring scheme is all off and you'll be sent up like any other house-breaker. But if Tacky Hode once gets you safe in his boat, it's my money on you as the son of a millionaire. Now I must be back to my joint. You won't have to think of me and Cleek when

you're setting in your pa's parlor and taking little sister out autoing. Put us out your mind—it'll make your manners freer and easier. Forget we're living. We're used to ingratitude and ain't asking no flowers. When the time's ripe we'll bring ourselves to your remembrance and help you bear your burdens."

CHAPTER V

THE ESCAPE

All that afternoon the wind blew from the south and by evening, even in the cellar under the old Smiling Lane Tenement, one could catch a breath of spring. It thrilled John, renewing his ambition to work up out of the reek and muck of the "bad lands." He had kept himself singularly free from the contagion of evil. There was only the burglary on Troost Avenue against him and much as he regretted it from prudential considerations, knowing himself to be no thief it failed to oppress him with a sense of guilt.

The scent of spring did more than strengthen the old resolve to break away from his uncle's influence at whatever cost. It carried his mind to Bettie Hode the daughter of the man who was to row him across the river. His mother and hers had been intimate friends and he and Bettie had known and liked each other since he could first remember. There was no prettier girl, he thought; there was none more dependable; and now the intangible something in the wind that pushed through the barred window and made the empty barrels quiver brought the soul-stirring dream of love. Surely he had loved her for a year without knowing it. He would tell her so; and as there might not be an opportunity at the river-side, he would write her a letter.

Searching among the old papers in one of the waste-boxes, a new idea occurred to him, suggested by finding a pencil-addressed en-

velope postmarked "New York Mar. 4." The year had not left its impression. This was the second day of March. He would put his note in this envelope and instruct Bettie, if occasion arose, to show it as proof that the fugitive had gone east. In the meantime, of course, he would go west—perhaps to Colorado Springs—anywhere but New York. Thus the note would not only throw the police off his trail, but put Bettie on the trail of his affections. No answer was needed; he believed he knew her heart. Some day he would send for her—

He erased from the envelope the address and substituted Bettie's. Then he set himself to the composition of his letter, using the pencil always carried for the checking off of orders at the restaurant. He enjoyed the fleeting moments, finding zest in self-expression while the springtide gently stirred his locks, suggesting flowering fields.

The note finished, he changed to the rough workman's garb provided by Blearstead, a dreamy look in his handsome dark eyes. From the city he would flee—yes, to Colorado Springs, since he had never been there. Under an assumed name, not "John Lyle Warring," certainly, he would start a new life, the life his mother had hoped for him. In Lagville there would no doubt be a great mystery over the unclaimed suitcase, while a revelation of its contents would revive wide discussion of the kidnapping. It would fill the papers. The millionaire would see the infant garments of his little one and the letters he had written hoping to recover him twenty years ago. It would be a great shock. Would it inspire him with hope or despair? Blearstead would know his nephew had broken from

his net, but what could he do, with that clue in Bettie's hands to direct suspicions toward the Atlantic coast? "Maybe I'm a big grape," John muttered with a grin, "but sure thing the world's big enough to swallow me!"

It was almost midnight before Cleek's cautious feet tiptoed to the head of the cellar stairs and his voice whispered the order to come up. In the darkness he grasped the young man's arm to draw his ear close to his pursed lips: "There's a cop just outside. On every side outside; see? You've got to make it over the roofs. Don't wait on me, your game's solitaire. I'm going to see if you hid your other clothes good enough. This is Luck to you." He crept down the stairs leaving the other standing in the bare room disagreeably surprised. So safe had he felt all day that the mention of the police had grated on his nerves.

Had the cat been crouching all day at the mouth of the cage? The windows were tacked over with soot-stained newspapers, but the moonlight hung there like ghost-lights hinting the way to the corridor. Noiselessly he glided up three pairs of narrow, greasy stairs and reached the trap that opened out upon the roof. Through the aperture he crawled to the flat deck where in the breathless heat of midsummer, men, women and children were wont to stretch out, arms spread skyward, waiting for the little space of freshness that came just before dawn.

From the deck the roof slanted sharply downward on all sides. Head-foremost he eased himself to a rotting cornice to peer over. The moon was old, bringing out walls and fire-escapes, roofs and chimneys with that relentless particularity so distasteful to youth. Even the shadows were robbed of glamour; in

the alley between the tenement and Blearstead's Eating House every irregular-shaped shadow was legible and in two of them John could read a policeman.

Creeping around to the opposite side he found the eaves projecting over the roof of the next building. It would be a far drop and the thud of his landing upon the slate might well evoke dangerous echoes, but the chance must be taken. Grasping the open-faced gutter till his body had stiffened to its length in air, he let go, then crouched behind a chimney at sound of a piercing whistle from the street. He felt himself upheld, a dark figure in a world of glaring light while behind every ridge and angle eyes seemed watching. Feet ran over the cobblestones. Violently a door slammed.

Quick as had been the impulse to double up behind the chimney came the thought that to linger there was madness. He ran. The roof was steep and he forgot—he was always forgetting—that his feet were not so sure as before the double breaking of his leg. He slipped. He went rolling to the eaves barely catching himself from being dashed to destruction. The sweat was streaming from his face as he pulled himself along a transverse iron rod back to the ridge-pole. Over the ridge he drew himself, then slid down against the rush of warm wind that carried away his hat.

On this side the roof brought up squarely against the wall of a higher tenement, a wide-mouthed gutter marking the juncture. A few feet above the water-course, a shuttered dormer window jutted toward him. The shutter gave way in his frantic grasp, opening outward with a shrill creak. He swung himself into a foul-aired room, the wind rushing after him. A few dark figures from among those

packed close on vile mattresses raised on unsteady elbows, and curses mingled with snores. The moon glared through the opening searching out with pitiless curiosity the rags and litter, drawing the eye now to a bloated hairy face, now to a mere glimpse of purplish lips and a nose in a frame of disordered tresses. A young man lay groaning in drunken slumber while the muddy boot of another sleeper sprawled across his neck. John stooped to remove the heavy foot then picked his way to the corridor, and though his clothes were mean and he wore a hunted air he looked no closer akin to the sleepers than if they had been the mud in the course of his crossing.

The corridor led him to the steps and he took two at a time sensible of teeming life in every room he passed; but on the way he met only a drunken man dizzily swaying on the landing of the second flight, and in the street-hallway a sobbing child with a bucket of water too heavy for it to carry.

"I'll take that for you, little man," he said cheerily, and the lad darted up, leading the way, his sobs subsiding, with no other token of gratitude. Coming back, he found the drunkard still trying to ascend. "Hard luck old top," John said, taking his flabby arm. "Let me help you on the way."

After all, not much time was lost and he had a warm feeling that something had been gained by the delay. Soon he was running along the street, the balmy wind thrilling in his bared hair. As he rounded the first corner a shout arose but he was not sure if it were meant for him. Later, after diving through a maze of criss-crossed alleyways, he came out under the steady radiance of an arc-light on a cross-street in which he was the only sign of

life, and when this was traversed he felt that his old life with all its dangers and sordidness was left behind. An exquisite sense of peace pervaded his senses and he took great breaths as if an intolerable weariness had been shaken off leaving him rested for any hard enterprise.

Pursuing his way light-heartedly he met no policeman, heard no alarm. The lonely lights of deserted streets swung higher and higher as he approached the river till they seemed set in the sky among the stars. A high bluff around which extensive levelling was in progress afforded the risky means of a short cut, and he slid and scrambled down the furrowed red surface carrying dust and stones with him. He had reached the "Bottoms." Behind him the red and gray faces of gnarled cliffs jutted out from the mainland in huge fantastic shapes like hideous caricatures of human faces buried chin downward. They blotted out all of the city except those lights in the sky and, here and there, narrow unpaved roads cut by the grinding of heavily-loaded wagons.

He was walking across a wide plain which stretched level as a sanded floor from the bluffs to the dark river. An occasional intrepid cottonwood tree with ancient river-drift in its branches looked like a bent old man with tow-sled locks. Though they were out of his course and stood far apart he hunted the protection of these trees, for the nakedness of the river-beach brought back the impression that he was being watched. An infolding of the higher ground held curiously fashioned houseboats, some stranded near the base of the cliffs where the last flood had carried them, others at the water's edge. Of these, only one was awake. From it shone a slender steady beam. It was the houseboat where Bettie lived; thither

Blearstead had directed him for the means of crossing the river, but the light was a warning to keep away. He stopped in dismayed surprise. The signal could mean only that the police had possession of the boat, and were awaiting his coming.

CHAPTER VI

BETTIE TO THE RESCUE

Tacky Hode's houseboat consisted of an old wooden streetcar set far back on a narrow deck which stood only a few feet above the water. Tacky among other things was a fisherman and as the Blearstead Eating House was supplied with fish through him, John saw him constantly, liking him less the oftener he saw him. But because he was a ruffian, capable of any crime to the taste of Blearstead and Cleek, his intimates, John held him as a match for any policeman. The houseboat might be swarming with officers of the law, but the signal light burning under their very noses was Hode's answer to the voice of authority. Nor did John suspect for a moment that his uncle or Cleek or Hode would play him false. If not honor, then self-interest was the cohesive force that bound the thieves together.

From the protection of a cottonwood tree his keen eyes caught the movement of a slight figure on the sand-waste. It was drawing nearer. Looking swiftly about for better shelter, he found only an upturned skiff, one side painted silver in the moonlight, and threw himself down beside it, seeking absorption in its miserly scarf of shade. The figure advanced rapidly, and suddenly it seemed to him that the delicious warm wind was running toward him on the bare feet of a girl. He scrambled up to greet Hode's daughter.

"You've got to hurry," she panted, lifting

both arms to brush back her hair. "Come ahead!"

As he kept pace with her flying feet she explained that her father had received word from Blearstead of his coming, but somehow the police had either heard it also, or had suspected it, knowing of their friendship. Half an hour ago two officers had descended upon the houseboat. They were there now, waiting for the fugitive to fling himself into their toils. Hode was practically a prisoner. The skiff, of course, was there, safely padlocked, with the key in a blue pocket.

The news had a peculiar effect upon the young man. It was like opening the door of a warm room to admit a piercing blast. It was not that the presence of policemen in the houseboat terrified him; he was not terrified; his face did not lose color. But there came over him a sickening sense of helplessness, a feeling that wherever he might flee the Law would be in wait to drag him to prison. They had known of the scheme to be rowed across the river by the fisherman, or had guessed it. They would find him in Colorado Springs. What was the use?

"But we are up to their tricks," Bettie grinned, brushing back her hair which the wind continually whipped about her dark face. She had always stirred him by her independent air, her resourcefulness, and tonight her confidence deepened his admiration. And how pretty! After a rigorous winter which had persisted until the morning of this very day, the air was rushing in the hightide of spring—and it seemed all Bettie's doing, as if there couldn't have been a real spring if there hadn't been Bettie.

"Where are we going?" he wanted to know.

"I'll get you across—don't you fret!"

"I'll hate to leave you, Bettie." He added in surprise, "I never knew what it's going to be like, leaving you! We've been such friends since we were kids wading in the river, your mother and mine so chummy and all. But I don't know how to say it—it's sort of written here: stick this letter in your dress and read it some time."

She took it with a sidelong look, but said nothing, only brushed at her hair.

Now they were under the bridge. It swung up there in the sky with its twinkling lights like a crown of black velvet incrustated with stars. The immense piers, milk-white in the moonlight, dwarfed them, and the skiff, tied to a hook in the breakwater, seemed a child's tiny paper boat.

"Climb in," Bettie said imperiously. "I'm barefooted on purpose for this job." Her dress was scant and short, her limbs sturdy as befitted those of a river-girl accustomed to aid with the nets and lines. As she pushed off there was instinctive grace in the flexible movements of her gleaming arms, bared to the shoulders. They were bronzed and generously modeled, the satiny skin slipping easily over the muscles. Beneath her throat where the blouse gaped low, the moonlight found a match for its snowy softness and lingered there lovingly.

"So you're not coming back," she said with mournful cadence, then caught up the oars with sudden energy while the moon glancing over her feet turned the water that trickled down her limbs to showers of pearls. "But if you did I guess you'd go again. It's been that way all my life. As soon as I make friends, the river rises and carries us away to another place. We can't take hold of anything. But

every time we came back here we found you waiting till you got to seem to me something like the bridge and the shore—always there, whatever floods come. Funny how I feel about you, John.” She gave a short rueful laugh.

“The way I feel about you is all in that letter,” he said, feeling his throat tighten from the unconscious pathos in her words. “I know how you hate to read, but you won’t mind reading that. It’s all written down.”

“All right, I’ll study it out. Pa and ma are just like driftwood that gets itself lodged for awhile in the bend of the river then gets washed away to nowhere, and me with ’em. You can just think of me a-floating down, just a-floating down to nowhere.”

“I’ll not think of you in any such way. You and I are going to get lodged together some day for keeps. It’s all in that letter. I’m not saying anything under the circumstances, but it’s written down.

“Where you going to? Maybe some time we’ll float there and tie up.”

Then he told her Blearstead’s scheme of having him impersonate the boy kidnapped as an infant from the home of the millionaire. How his uncle would have raged to hear the secret bared in all its details! But John and Bettie had always told each other everything in perfect trust—she knew even about the burglary on Troost Avenue. As he talked she rowed steadily while both kept keen watch up and down the stream. He felt that no moments were so sweet as those spent in baring his heart to Bettie; it had always been so—and what could that mean except that which he had written in the letter?

“Of course,” he concluded, “if I decide to fall for the plot, I’ll never come back. Be-

cause I'll never be myself again. John Walters will simply vanish from the earth. But that other character, John Lyle Warring, *he'll* come and find you and carry you away with him."

She asked breathlessly, "And are you going to do it?"

He laughed perplexedly. "If you'd asked me that half an hour ago I'd have said, 'Not on your life; I'm bound for Colorado Springs.' But I don't know how it is—I don't think it's from losing my nerve or getting stagefright—somehow finding that the cops had chased me to your father's houseboat, yes, worse than that, had got there ahead of me—looks like there's no spot on earth safe for Johnny Walters. And I want to be safe to lead some kind of decent life, don't you know."

"Poor John!" Tears showed in her eyes, tears just for him; they were beautiful.

"Yes—just like that. It seems horridly mean to impose on the old man as his long-lost son. But, look here, Bet; suppose he never caught on to the trick, never learned any different; see? One thing certain, if I do fall for the drama, I'm going to be just as good a son to the governor as I know how to act the part. And I guess," he added with sudden softness, "I had pretty good practice with my dear old mammy."

As they swept along with the current she gave him a long, tender look. He had always been different from anybody else in her world; like a glimpse of a foreign country she found him, and his present prospects—of course he would escape to Lagville—seemed immense, gorgeous beyond dreams. Delicate shades of morality caused her no uneasiness; to the more obvious virtues she clung instinctively,

but in the present case morality seemed not involved. It was simply a matter of dropping one's old self like an outworn garment, and assuming a new self, finer, richer, above all, safe.

"My land!" sighed Bettie, thrusting in the oars deep to swing the skiff to the opposite shore and bracing her feet for the struggle, "if I knew some way or other to stop being myself!"

"I wouldn't have you anybody else for a million dollars," cried her companion, "and I ain't flush, either."

"Yes, but what I want is to stop being Bettie Hode. Reckon you don't know of any kidnaped girl that there's a lamp in the window waiting for, do you?"

"I don't know any girl anywhere that's half as pretty and good and game as you are, Bettie, with your dear old laugh and your—but it's all written down. You can read about it. As for me, I haven't made up my mind, but I'm afraid I'm going to be driven to the rich man's door. And I hate it. It worries me blind. Because I haven't had enough of being myself. I never did get tired of just being John Walters."

CHAPTER VII

AT THE DOOR

Two days later, John rang the Warring door-bell and waited—he was kept waiting a long time—on the threshold of his adventure. A dozen times since his parting from Bettie had come the resolve to give over the enterprise; but the papers had been so full of him, even to his picture, which happily lacked resemblance, that when he came to write his name in the register of an inland hotel, John Walters was cast aside and “John Lyle Warring” took his place in the world. For good or ill he was now John Lyle Warring, and in spite of scruples and hazards he was resolved to act the part well.

Standing on the broad stone-pillared porch he justified himself that he might play the part with freer mind. Only long enough to throw the police effectively off the scent would he wear the mantle of wealth and station as shield against the storm—as soon as it was safe he would disappear taking nothing with him but his freedom. Should he be accepted as the son indeed, doubtless the later disillusion would leave sore hearts, but after all no terrible misfortune would ensue, such, for instance, as a term in the penitentiary. That prospect of state’s prison turned his face squarely to the great adventure.

“I’ve got a pretty good home,” he reflected with a grin, appraising the massive house with its turrets, its spacious windows, its generous balconies, and its surroundings of well-kept

lawns and deep garden. For a sleepy little river-town, the place was imposing, the house a mansion. There was nothing like it in sight though it stood midway up the street of Lagville's most pretentious residences.

It was four in the afternoon. About two hours earlier he had stepped empty-handed from the train. There had been no difficulty at the express office in obtaining possession of the suitcase and three-quarters of a mile upstream a deserted cattle-shed had afforded a retired dressing-room. Quickly he had been transformed from the slouching laborer to a flashily-dressed young man of leisure, for the suit supplied by Blearstead and embodying his ideals of a real gentleman, suggested a confidence man, or at best a connoisseur of the race-tracks.

John's serene self-possession bore a strong family resemblance to impudence though in reality not closely akin, and went well with the gaily striped breeches and flaming tie. After final touches had been deftly given by means of pocket-comb and tiny mirror in the side of its case—accessories of adornment he was never without—he had done up the baby-clothes and old letters in a small parcel, then sunk the suitcase with its laborer's clothes. On his return to Lagville the very express agent had failed to recognize the man in overalls who had come to town presumably hunting a job.

When at last the door opened, he felt that his "job" was to be definitely given him.

"Well?" inquired a cool, drawling voice and he was confronted by a young woman of about his age whom at first sight he found, more than anything else, pronouncedly ugly.

He thought ruefully, "Little sister!" Gal-

lantly he raised his white-and-green hat, smiled the smile that made friends even of ticket-agents, and inclined from the waist. "Could I see Mr. Warring on a matter of business?"

"No," came the response without an instant's indecision. "Mr. Warring is not able to attend to any business and Mr. Glaxton is away to be gone a month."

Finding she was about to close the door he spoke rapidly: "I'm sorry not to get to see Mr. Glaxton, too—" wondering who Mr. Glaxton was— "but I couldn't stay a month for that pleasure. Really my business is very important and pressing; you can't think how pressing it is! I must see Mr. Warring without delay, for his sake as well as for my own."

She shrugged at the waste of time. "The more important your business is, the less likely are you to see Mr. Warring." Again the door was about to close in his face. But his geniality had not been without effect upon her cool, inelastic nature, for she paused to murmur vaguely, "When Mr. Glaxton comes—"

He was swift to take advantage of her hesitation. "But you'll surely take up a line for me to Mr. Warring?" From his pocket he fished pencil and paper looking for all the world as if about to record a gambling-bet. Yet despite his sporting clothes and confident bearing, there was something about his expression that pleased her; it was his manner of suggesting that he had not observed that she was ugly.

Her nose was too long not to catch any eye turned her way, while her mouth, unfortunately small, a mere round hole, left a wide expanse of sallow cheek-spaces. She was stooped over, yet even so, towered, being so much taller than other women. But John manifested

nothing but alert interest, ready for instantaneous friendship.

"I'll take it upstairs, though it won't be any use," she observed, showing a little more of the whites of her eyes. "If they think best they can hand it to him, which they won't, I'm afraid."

"Things seem badly balled up," he observed cheerfully, "with Mr. Glaxton away for a month and the rest of 'em sitting as committee on the old gentleman's actions."

She looked at him with something like an awakening of life in her eyes, and her voice came with less listlessness. "Maybe things *are* mixed up, some."

"Seems so to a stranger. Well, this message will put a little yeast in the mixture and start something to working." And he wrote,

"Information concerning John Lyle Warring."

He could not resist handing her the message in such fashion as to force the words upon her notice but she showed neither surprise nor animation. "Well, I'll take it up to them." And she bore the slip of paper away leaving him shut out on the porch.

"No, that can't be little sister," he reflected. "Strange house! But maybe this is the way millionaires do it!"

CHAPTER VIII

THE CLAIMANT

Waiting on the porch, John spread his legs rather far apart to examine as much of himself as possible in his pocket-mirror to find if his hair was well arranged and his trousers still perfectly creased. But the sound of light footsteps caused him to perform a miracle of readjustments. The door was opened with a jerk and a girl of nineteen or twenty bade him come in, her voice breathless, her cheeks burning as if she had just broken away from a scene of warm dispute.

He had the impression, which did not strike him as contradictory, that the dark hall was flooded with light by her presence and that in going with her he was not leaving earth's brightness but was following the day. He might have found her less bewilderingly appealing had he not been expecting the return of the long nose, the diminutive mouth, the sallow cheeks. On account of the previous vision it was natural to take keener delight in the slight and graceful figure, the fresh complexion of the oval cheeks, the glowing golden hair reminding him of fairy tales, the hands exquisitely shaped. Wherever she moved, light flashed, leaving an incredible emptiness where she had been, a coldness, a desolation. Here indeed was a sister worth having and, to his way of thinking, worth terrible plunges into the depths of fictitious narrative. What a shield to wear as a defence against the vengeance of the law! How perfect her mouth,

how rounded her cheeks, what adorable ears!

Not one word did she utter while leading him across the hall to what in Lagville was always known as the "front parlor;" but he could see that she was tremendously moved. It was shown in her rapid step, her flashing eyes, the eagerness of her hand upon the door, her manner of waving him into the room. But, alas! when they were within she joined herself to two persons in waiting as if to show emphatically that he must stand or fall alone. Yet in spite of this definite withdrawal he felt that she was leaning toward him, and he believed that one of her friends, she who had first opened to him the door, was destined also to prove his ally.

"Be seated," said the oldest of the waiting group, a lady of middle life, correct in tone, poise and dress, really a formidable creature who knew the standards of society's more sheltered classes, and conformed to them scrupulously as to a religion. John was really afraid of her nose-glasses dangling on their elegant gold chain, of her rustling skirts, of her severe gray eyes.

As all sat down, those three in a row across the room, he decided with a pang that the beautiful blond could not, after all, be his "sister." Surely the overpowering lady with the handsome face and austere countenance must be her mother, whereas the millionaire's wife was dead. Emerging from a cloud of disappointment, he realized that they were regarding him with intent eyes which constantly rose from his face to a spot in the wall above his head, only to return more fixed than ever. It was like a pantomime; there was perfect concert in their movements as if they had been rehearsing their mystery play.

He shattered the sinister silence by exclaiming, with a smile, "Let me have a look, too!" then turned his neck to stare upward.

They were instinctively comparing him with a portrait done years ago when Mr. Warring was a young man—for the portrait was that of the millionaire. John slowly rose, staring, chilled by the conviction that all resemblance was lacking. If he knew himself, he did not look like that. He did not feel like that. Would they not presently cry out "Fraud"?

The oil painting was that of a dark, aristocratic-looking young man with clustering hair, high forehead, sensitive mouth. The chin was very handsome, the nose straight and fine. The whole expression was that of dignity, sincerity, self-respect without arrogance. One felt that such a man could do nothing mean, that his thoughts would not be trivial, that his words would be measured, his opinions of weight. He was a thorough gentleman and could not have been otherwise. It is good to be thought well of by such a man; his approval conveys distinction.

John stared in dismay, fancying himself as far removed from such a personage as he felt Blearstead to be removed from his sympathies. Surely they must see that for him to claim relationship with the head of the family was preposterous. The silence deepened. The lady's skirts no longer rustled, her slender chain ceased to dangle.

But he must try for it. There was nothing else to do. After all, it could not be said that any feature in the painting offered absolute contradiction. He turned to the group with an air as cool as if he were the portrait-painter, betraying by no quiver of tone the pound-

ing of his heart. "If it were hung in a better light—" he murmured.

Touched by the sound of his voice to emotion seemingly of amazement alone, the lovely blond started up with a breathless cry. He was struck by the wholly unconscious rhythm of her movements. What a different girl from those of his world! He tried to imagine Bettie, for instance, sharing the atmosphere of this home, but fancy limped under the burden. This made him realize how alien he must appear to the scene but he lost self-consciousness in wondering what the girl was about to do. Standing with eyes glued to his face she uttered no word yet seemed about to cry out, her arms visibly trembling as she pressed them against her body.

"Wait, Lucia!"

Under the compelling voice of the lady with the nose-glasses she fell back in her chair, covering her face with her hands. The ugly girl, shoulders bent as if to diminish the extraordinary height of her thin frame, kept her round, fascinated eyes upon the stranger, yet through her homeliness and open curiosity shone an indefinable something akin to Lucia's charm. All these people were kin to the picture on the wall, if not in blood, then in spirit. But *he!*— Surely they would cry out against him.

"I must warn you," the lady spoke with cold repression, "that we have in times past and gone been imposed upon by men pretending to know that Mr. Warring's son is living. A few years ago an unspeakable character had the baseness to claim that he was the missing heir." She gave a slight but quite obvious twitch to her skirts as if to remove them by that much from the proximity with the stranger. "There

was, I must admit, a certain resemblance, but Mr. Glaxton exposed the imposter. It was at that time that Mr. Glaxton came to live in the house."

"I can well believe," John gravely responded, "that you must have been persecuted by false claimants showing up from mercenary motives."

As if he had not spoken, she continued, her voice at the freezing-point: "Mr. Warring is seriously ill; his heart is affected. Doubtless he could endure the shock of happiness on learning that his son is living. But should he take to heart some one who later proved an imposter, it would kill him. The evil one who should play upon his credulity would be not alone an imposter, but a murderer." Then abruptly, "Had we not better end this interview at once?" And she lifted the glasses to her nose.

He rose. What she had said weighed more with him than her manner, although the effect of the nose-glass movement was to transport him to the uttermost horizon of her perception. Even for the sake of his personal liberty, could he voluntarily take chances of forever stilling the father's overburdened heart?

"I think," he said still outwardly calm, "that possibly I had better retire."

Lucia who, according to his judgment, resembled the austere lady more nearly than he resembled the portrait, again sprang to her feet, her hands leaving her face. "No! You shall not retire!" Her tones were vibrant, her eyes flashed, her cheeks glowed, her little white fists were clenched. With her burning hair and roseleaf complexion she made a living picture in deeply-laid colors that filled his eyes to their remotest depths. "No!"

"Lucia!" the lady warned. "The best families, Lucia."

This phrase was a reminder of the duty she owed her station in life, the duty to appear reserved, untouched by circumstance—something Lucia with her impulsive nature was often forgetting. She darted to the wall to press a call-button, at the same time looking back over her shoulder at the lady who remained a handsome statue of petrified propriety. "You must let me manage this, Aunt Hildegarde."

John, who had made a movement to retire, stopped short. Then she was not, after all, the daughter of the austere lady. She must be Mr. Warring's daughter. If he could risk the shock to the invalid's heart, thereby saving himself from the officers of the law by remaining in the house for a few weeks, this young girl would be his "sister." He was overwhelmed by the desire to remain near her thus miraculously circumstanced.

She wheeled upon him not with hostility but with scintillating eye-thrusts that sought to pierce his armor. "Who are you?" she demanded.

He was drawn toward her so strongly that he felt it necessary to brace himself by placing between them a barrier. "It doesn't matter—I'll go."

Her face lost much of its color, her soft lips hardened. "You have made a claim, indirectly, it is true; but you shall justify it, or—" She pointed toward the open door.

In the hall just beyond the threshold, in answer to the push-button, stood a man of extreme height, slender but powerful, who could have held his own with even Blearstead or Cleek. Clean-shaven with blue jowl, no expression but that of eagle watchfulness dom-

inated the large features. He gave a singular impression of clamminess as if his hands were always damp, though his black suit was speckless, his linen scrupulously fresh.

John, regarding him appraisingly, felt frailer than he really was. It seemed his ill-fortune always to be opposed by larger and stronger men; still there was compensation in the fact that his courage always swelled to meet the issue. He could make no pretense to the joy of a son of the house coming to his own, because he could not play the hypocrite; but he could regard the man-servant with a look of cool contempt.

"I am determined," the girl cried, "that my father's health shall not be undermined by these—these interviews. If all is not right, I shall make an example of you as a warning to others." She looked toward the hall-door and the man gave a furtive and sinister nod. "No one shall ever come again as you have come." Her voice was hard, her eyes flashed fire.

And then suddenly the mist showed in the tender blue, and impassioned longing struggled into her voice. "But if you can prove yourself—oh, prove yourself!"

His eyes fell before her yearning look, and with the music of her desire ringing in his ears, he could find no word. But the issue must be met now and forever. He snatched the package of baby-clothes from his pocket and tore it open to display the time-stained letters.

Her brave defiance was gone. With shaking hands she opened one of the letters to find words dancing at her in her father's unmistakable writing. Here were phrases he had often repeated to her from memory, acceptance of the abductor's terms, description of the pro-

posed hiding-place for the ransom-money. The page blinded her eyes as if it burned as the sun. To clear them, she swept John with a wavering glance, then turned for a last time to the picture on the wall. It seemed to whisper to her, telling her that all was well. Suddenly she dropped everything to throw her arms about his neck.

“My brother!” she sobbed, holding him close.

CHAPTER IX

ACCEPTED AS THE HEIR

During the first breathless moments following his definite claim to the heirship, John's senses were blurred. A dream-sister clung to him, while to himself he became also a figure in a sweet, impossible dream. In this misty unreality it was Aunt Hildegarde who acquired the sharp outlines of the world of fact. Her hand clasped his with the cool pressure of one whose emotions conform to the strictest standards of politeness.

"I need not say that it rejoices us to accept you as John Lyle Warring." Her air was that of one who seldom reveals herself. "We never dare wake your father, but as soon as he is awake Simmons will call me to break the news to him." She nodded dismissal to the watchful man-servant who glided away from the door without having expressed in any manner understanding of what had taken place.

The ugly girl was on her knees gathering up the scattered objects and putting them in Aunt Hildegarde's lap without a word to indicate her thoughts, or explain her relationship to the group; if it had been defined, John had been too stunned to grasp distinctions.

"I felt from the first you were my brother," Lucia was saying hysterically, as far as possible keeping him all to herself. "I believed in you—oh, I want you to know that I did believe in you. Only, I was determined not to be disappointed again. I have wanted you so long. And I have wanted you so—so

hard! I couldn't think you were dead. When even father gave you up, I said—I *knew*. And here you are! Here you are!"

"Yes," he murmured, "there's nothing more wonderful than that—here I am. It seems my mind can't get beyond that."

She lifted her head to brush back his hair, examining his face through swimming eyes. "You are so handsome."

"Oh—please!" he gasped, closing his eyes.

"And just exactly like father at your age."

"I wish I could think so." He faced Aunt Hildegarde determinedly: "Did you observe the likeness?"

"My reception of you was cool because, as you can well imagine, we have been so often deceived," was the indirect answer. "It was so far from our thoughts—and you were dressed so—so as you are."

Her tone of voice opened his eyes to the incongruity of his appearance. He looked ruefully at his clothes.

"Yes," Lucia laughed, "aren't they dreadful! Seeing his countenance fall she hurried to present the ugly girl who proved to be Aunt Hildegarde's daughter. "You must call her 'Virgie.' She's the best friend I have in the world, and now she's your best friend. Everything I am, of course you are; and everything I have, of course you have." She drew him down beside her on the divan, clinging to his hand. Then she jumped up to look him over with the most adorable enthusiasm; then resumed her seat and his hand with an air of absolute proprietorship.

John said to himself, "Of course it was never intended for a man to get into heaven with a false passport. I wonder what'll happen to

drive me into outer darkness? This can't last."

Lucia, still breathless from joy, gazed upon him fondly. "Are you really glad?" she insisted; "I mean glad, *glad?*"

"Just like that."

"You don't show it. Oh, what a dreadful reserved brother I've found! Not once have you kissed me."

He tried to rally. "But you see, I'm not used to finding sisters. But if you think I am not enjoying it—well! You just go on holding my hand. I like that, too. I—I know I'm hardly adequate, I've been raised so queer—"

"You are to tell me all about that. I know I'm selfish wanting you all to myself, but father's turn will come. His heart is so uncertain. We daren't rouse him. But I simply can't wait till he wakes up. I want to hear every little thing that belongs in your life up to this hour. Begin at the beginning, dearest boy, and don't leave out a morsel. Are you always so good-natured and forgiving when people doubt you as we seemed to doubt you awhile ago? Darling John, promise never to think of that again."

While soothing her regret, he was trying desperately to recall the narrative invented in the basement of the Smiling Lane tenement. To gain time he addressed the girl still kneeling on the floor: "Come sit on my other side, Virgie—then listen, children, to the story of my life."

Virgie looked eagerly to her mother for permission, for in spite of her years she was completely under the other's domination. "You'll crowd him," Aunt Hildegarde decided. "Mercy, child, how you stoop! I'd straighten

up my figure if I were as high as the moon."

Virgie reddened. She had been persecuted thus through life, so keen had been her mother's disappointment over her lack of beauty.

"You shall sit on my other side," John declared, taking her hand as if she were a princess. "And let me say that you are higher than the moon in my regard." Then quickly, to divert the mother's attention from her daughter, "What about this Mr. Glaxton who has gone away to be absent a month?" On his arrival, the name had been used as a threat against him; now it seemed to react upon them. Into their faces flashed looks of fear or distrust, instantly suppressed.

"He is a lawyer," Virgie said, her voice sharp with precision.

Lucia spoke constrainedly, "And father's cousin; after us, his nearest relative."

"Yes," Aunt Hildegarde spoke with a note of triumph in her cool voice, "first come you two—then Mr. Glaxton. It is delightful to know that since an hour ago we have found another link in the chain of relationship."

"It comes to me," John murmured, "that Mr. Glaxton is not a jolly person to have in the house."

Lucia darted her eyes toward the door as if to make sure that Simmons was not listening, then grasped his arm intently. "If you could—" She checked herself abruptly, but her eyes never left his.

Virgie muttered, "Oust him!"

"Virginia," her mother sighed, "where do you pick up such words? Will you never remember the best families?"

"Just wait till I get in the game," John boasted. "I'll do for Cousin Glaxton. I guess that's the work in this house cut out for me. It's my pass to this Garden of Eden."

CHAPTER X

JOHN ACCOUNTS FOR HIMSELF

Confronted by the necessity of giving a full account of himself, John was dismayed to find that the dizzying experiences of the past hour had wrought havoc with his prearranged narrative. To fortify himself against possible cross-examinations, he manoeuvred for time by urging the others to define the conditions to which in the new home he must adapt himself.

He learned that J. L. Warring, his "father" had, as a penniless orphan, been taken care of by a well-to-do couple to whom, a few years later, a daughter was born. Mrs. Abbottsfield ("Aunt Hildegarde") was that daughter; and though the orphan-boy had never been legally adopted, they lived in the same house until his majority as brother and sister. Then Warring went to New York and during feverish years of growing prosperity, lost touch with those who had made his success possible. He married; his first born was kidnapped; and after spending an immense sum in the vain endeavor to find trace of him, his wife died leaving a daughter, Lucia, about ten years old.

Then his heart turned toward those who had been to him father, mother, sister, and he journeyed to what he had always called "home." But his foster-parents had died after severe reverses of fortune, and the daughter, now a widow with an only child, was earning her living as a social secretary. Warring who had conceived a strong dislike for city-life after his wife's death, left New York to bury him-

self in the little river-town of the Middle West and hither he brought Mrs. Abbottsfield and Virgie to live as intimate members of his family. That was before his health showed signs of failing. Mrs. Abbottsfield felt free to accept his generosity not so much because her parents had once been everything to him but because she could serve as governess to little Lucia.

All had gone smoothly until Mr. Glaxton entered upon the scene, taking Mr. Warring's business affairs in charge. He was a Denver lawyer whose connection to the millionaire was clearly established and Mr. Warring who had known nothing of his people developed an affection for the other amounting to infatuation. He would not hear a whisper against his adviser and during the past year of rapidly failing health, even a look of disapproval of Glaxton caused the older man's heart to flutter alarmingly. Glaxton had given up his Denver practice which was considerable, to devote all his time to the management of the Warring properties.

"I fancy I can see through that fellow," John said indignantly. "He came to this little village meaning all the time to live off of—*him*, but managed it so that he thought he had to beg him—that's Glaxton—to build his nest right up in his rooftree. I suppose there's no doubt that he is a cousin of—of *his*?"

"Dear," Lucia entreated, "call him father."

"Yes, of course. But are you certain of Mr. Glaxton's kinship?"

"There is absolutely no doubt possible," said Aunt Hildegarde in a repressed tone. "It's as certain as your own."

"Oh, I see," John murmured uncertainly. Lucia had accepted him wholeheartedly. Mrs.

Abbottsfield had appeared to do the same; but had she? And what was Virgie thinking behind those big round eyes with their show of milky whites?

Lucia grasped his arm to give it an affectionate squeeze. "Do let's drop Cousin Glaxton," she exclaimed vivaciously. "When he's here you can't think of anything else, but let's enjoy our month's holiday. I'm crazy to hear all about you. It'll be another hour before father can see us, so don't leave out a thing."

His thoughts had not been given up wholly to Glaxton; he had made several wild efforts to recapture the main points of his story. Upon one thing he was resolved; not to connect his mother in any way with his fiction. He had seen enough of the world to understand that she did not belong to the world his new friends inhabited. They would not understand how she had spent herself for him at humble toil, teaching him to aspire to what she had been denied, and how, though so incompetent a guide, she had in fact led him to the foot of the upward path. "I may not ascend with you," she had in effect said; "but yonder is the setting for your solitary adventures." He would have liked to explain how the obscure woman had installed bright dreams in his mind and preserved him from the arrogance of ignorance. Since this could not be revealed, he was resolved not to invent another woman to take her place for he was jealous for the sacrificing devotion of her who had died in his arms. Yet how could his story be told with no mention of her gentle hand on his pillow, her cheery voice at the door?

With their eyes fixed intently upon him, he realized how difficult it was going to be to hide the truth. But John was always at his

best when most hardly beset, and he began in his easiest manner. "I was born—wait; I'm back too far. The first things I can remember: I'm a kid living in New Orleans. I guess you can call it living. Pretty hard living! I'm with the man who kidnapped me, Jake Baxter—you know the man your father wrote the letters to."

"*Our* father," Lucia corrected him.

"Certainly. Do you see my abductor? A big, ox-jawed bully of a man with fists like sledge-hammers and a way of swearing to raise your hair on end. At first he expected to get a fortune out of my bones—such of 'em, I mean, as he didn't break when knocking me about. Meant to take me back home when he could do it in safety to himself. When I was big enough to catch the vision that beatings are not real necessities of life, I ran away. I'd always wanted an education and I was determined to get one or die trying. So one cold bitter night with the snow up to your shoetops—"

"This was New Orleans?" Virgie murmured questioningly.

"Yes, that was the year that froze the bananas on the bushes. I went East and got a job. I think I've done every kind of work—except act as waiter at a restaurant. I drew a line at eating-houses. I sure fought for an education but at last got it down with both hands around its throat. If all the books I've read were in this room, you and I would have to go out in the hall. Understand me, my knowledge is fearfully limited, of course, but there are a million things in my mind I've never had a chance to use. I've been thrown all my life with the kind of people who didn't care whether Hamlet was mad or not. To pick

up my learning I've literally scoured the country; been everywhere, I think, except Kansas City. I was on my way to Philadelphia when I got a wire saying Thompson was dying—to come quick, he had an important secret to tell me concerning my parents."

"Who was Thompson?" Lucia asked, listening absorbedly.

"Don't you know?—the man that kidnapped me."

"But *his* name," Aunt Hildegarde said with a gasp, "his name is Jake Baxter."

"Yes—but he'd been breaking into banks and that sort of thing, and had to change his name. He was Thompson at the last. But he's the same person you're speaking of. Of course his real name was Jake Baxter. So I hurried to New Orleans where I'd never expected to set foot again. And there on his deathbed, he told me everything and turned over the articles of identification that he'd kept all this while in an old suitcase. He'd lost track of the man he'd stolen the child from—"

"Father," Lucia prompted him.

"Yes, certainly; didn't have any idea where he was living or he'd have drained him long ago. But an article came out in the paper during his last sickness and he saw the piece and found out. He died and I came straight here. I'd always thought that kidnapper was my father. I'd never suspicioned my name was John Lyle Warring, never once."

"Will you be satisfied to live in a quiet little town after all your wonderful adventures?" Lucia asked wistfully.

"Satisfied!" he exclaimed. "With you here?" After their acquaintanceship grew deeper, he remarked, "I wish I'd put as much time in at law as I have at Greek and Latin. Then per-

haps I could persuade Mr. Glaxton to go back to Denver. I know a lot about police courts and all that, but I'm afraid my law isn't legal."

When Simmons came to announce that Mr. Warring was awake, Mrs. Abbottsfield went upstairs to break the news. Lucia dared not show her father the betraying radiance of her face.

CHAPTER XI

DOES HE RESEMBLE THE PICTURE?

John's compunctions over rousing false hopes in Mr. J. L. Warring, his aversion to the deceptive part he had assumed as Lucia's brother, and the realization that always the danger of exposure hung over his head dwindled in a brief time to insignificance. Nor was this because to have acted otherwise must have proved his undoing. His acceptance of the situation was not based upon negative grounds. During the first interview with the millionaire he found how incredibly weak he was, just hovering, as it appeared, upon the borderline between life and the Great Silence.

The reaction induced by the recovery of his "son" was marvelous. It was not that Mr. Warring became a new man, rather that he became a man, the master of his own desires, his own actions. For months he had existed in a state of apathy, staying in bed or being laboriously helped downstairs according to the advice of Mr. Glaxton—or, during Mr. Glaxton's absence, of Simmons the man-servant whom Mr. Glaxton had brought with him from Colorado.

But now Mr. Warring knew exactly what he wanted: to be constantly with John and the rest of the family; and Simmons who had gradually encroached with his ministrations till he had become the autocrat of the sickroom, found himself reduced to the status of an ordinary employe.

Spring was opening up delightfully, and a

few days after John's coming, Mr. Warring with one arm about him and the other resting upon Lucia's shoulder, toured the premises discussing gardening and the making of new lawn-beds, and declaring his purpose of going to church and taking up his business at the bank. Though John had seen nothing of his slowing fading away in the flesh and of his losing grip on the interests of life, he had been told about it and even without having been told must partly have understood. No one could take such immense zest in the commonest experiences of a secluded life had he not for a long time lost zest in everything. Mr. Warring was like a prisoner unexpectedly given freedom and John realized that his coming had wrought the transformation. When he should vanish from the scene it would no doubt terribly shock the old man who, however, would be none the worse for the episode—might indeed be the better for it since he already looked younger.

His rapt attention while John related experiences from his turbulent life brought the sparkle to his deep-set eyes, his form would straighten, his thin cheeks glow, his shock of white hair seem to bristle with renewed vitality. What a simple-hearted, confiding man! How could John help loving an audience that hung so breathlessly upon his every word? The old man and the girl grew dear to him and it was his steadfast purpose so long as he must hide under their roof to be to them a son and a brother; also to remain as long as Blearstead kept away. But the moment it became a question of getting money from these trustful friends for Blearstad or for himself, he would flee though that might mean State's prison. These reflections did something to rob the days

of a part of their charm. Regret that he was not what he appeared and realization that once driven out he could never come back lent vague unreality to everything he said or did. He told himself he was no longer John Walters but John Lyle Warring and to preserve the incognito he sought to enter into the feelings that could belong by right only to John Lyle Warring. In this he was so successful—for his adaptability had always been marvelous—that when he thought of one day resuming his old self he felt cold as if stripped of covering in an icy wind.

“Yes, I’m going to take up everything right where I dropped it,” Mr. Warring enthusiastically declared as the three slowly promenaded the garden still brown with last year’s leaves. “There’s the bank; a few years ago I was the president, and I’m still a director. I’ll go there daily as I used to, meet the boys and gossip in my easy chair before one of the big windows. If a farmer’s wagon or a stray dog comes to Lagville it passes before that bank-window. I always spent a couple of hours there in the afternoon. Your Cousin Glaxton got me out of the habit, I hardly know why. I’ll work you into a place there—no, I’ve been turning over a big lumber scheme for you, John. You ought to be at the head of a big business. I own a lot of timber-land and a string of lumberyards in small towns. But all that must come later. I’ll have to take a trip and nose around a bit before Cousin Glaxton comes back—he’s always afraid I’ll overdo my strength. And there’s church. Your mother was a devoted member, and after I lost her, I found some comfort there. No one was a more regular attendant at services until—well, it seems I’ve dropped everything. Lucia

keeps up the family religion. It's very curious, now that I think of it, how all my old habits are broken. John, what church are you a member of?"

"I've never taken the vows," John answered with deep solemnity.

"But you're young. Listen, my boy: when your heart's broken, there's nothing else. I shall be cruelly distressed if you are antagonistic to the church."

"Don't you have one uneasy moment over that," John said heartily. "If you want me to go to church, that's where I'm going. How often is it?"

Lucia laughed. Her smile was one he had grown used to look for, full of whimsical humor softened by deep affection, and it was enough to make her smile just to look up and find before her the brother she had yearned for throughout life. "Twice on Sunday and every Wednesday night." She bent her head behind her father's shoulder to give him one of those adorable smiles. "And just think!—always alone, for Aunt Hildegarde and Virgie belong to a different church."

"You'll never go alone while I'm in the city," John declared. "And as to that other church—couldn't we go to both of 'em? Couldn't be too often to suit me; not with you."

"Bless your heart, it does me good to hear you." Mr. Warring squeezed his arm. "Your Cousin Glaxton has taken a violent antipathy to our minister and is determined to drive him away. He thinks of course that he has just cause, but I'm sure he must be mistaken."

"Our minister is a splendid young man," Lucia declared glowingly.

John felt a lowering of his spirits. "Single man?" he hazarded.

"Yes—but he's engaged."

John sighed, "Then I'm for him."

Mr. Warring spoke hesitatingly: "Your Cousin Glaxton is mistaken in him, I'm sure. But he is so set against him—that may be one reason why I quit going to church. But the minister never comes near—he ought to hunt me up, oughtn't he? I hardly understand." He passed his hand through his hair. "I hardly know what has taken place about me the past eight months. I have been in a sort of daze. It's my heart. My heart has been terribly out of order. But you've made it whole, my boy."

This was spoken with such touching simplicity that dimness came to the young man's eyes. He wondered at the affection his presence had evoked. Why did they like him? That he should love them seemed the most natural thing in the world. But what, he asked himself, was there about him to win their love? Possibly his unconsciousness of charm might have partly met the question.

Lucia murmured, "We are rather unfortunate in our friends as far as the church is concerned. I have no right to reproach Mr. Glaxton."

Her father corrected her; "Call him Cousin Glaxton, my dear."

"Because," Lucia went on, "Eugene Ware is just as determined to drive away our minister. He is very bitter against him and, indeed, against the members of the church. I seem to be his only exception."

John looked around Mr. Warring to scrutinize her countenance. "Who's this Eugene Ware?" he asked abruptly.

She blushed and for once did not meet his eyes.

Mr. Warring said, "Eugene and Lucia are to be married the first of June."

"You don't mean it!" John exclaimed. "Shall we go in the house? Seems chilly out here."

The next afternoon John sought Virgie Abbottsfield, finding her in the upstairs living-room, busily sewing. He drew up his chair with a confidential smile. "Sewing the wedding garments—what?"

Virgie had so long been used to social neglect that John's friendship never lost for her the freshness of its charm. She never felt that she should straighten up when he came through the door, or that he was seeing her nose when looking into her eyes.

"Tell me," he continued, "just what sort of chump is this Eugene Ware."

Virgie kept her gaze upon her needle. "He's good-looking and just the right age for Lucia, and he's the proprietor and owner of the Ware Drygoods Company. The girls consider him the 'catch' of Lagville. There's no other young man so prominent. He belongs to one of the best families and he has a good deal of money."

"I suppose there's nothing criminal against him?" John suggested, not hopefully.

Virgie opened her eyes, showing a great deal of the whites. "He's at the head of our best set."

"Our best set," John echoed disconsolately, "I wouldn't think Lagville big enough to have two sets in it without crowding one of 'em into the river. But I suppose there never was but one time when everybody belonged to the best family and that was when Cain and Abel were kids. Just between us, Virgie, what does a fellow do in this burg to pass the time? Of course I appreciate the opportunity of making

church three times a week, but that must leave a good many hours unoccupied."

"We have our Moving Picture Palace," Virgie said brightly.

"Yes, and I'll bet that's where Eugene Ware is sitting himself up while Lucia is doing time at the meeting-house. But I'll put a stop to that."

"How do you mean?"

"I mean he'll go to church, and he'll swallow that minister while I'm in the city. Lucia is unhappy about him, but I'll lead him right up to the front seat and make him graze on that young minister's discourses."

She shook her head. "Eugene is a very hard man to lead."

"All right; don't say anything to her about it. This is a little secret between you and me. Of course if she knew he'd been dragged there by force she wouldn't find the sacrifice so acceptable."

Virgie still shook her head.

"That's all right, Virgie, I know how you feel. But you don't realize how determined I am that Lucia shall be happy. Now, give me a line on this affair, that's a good fellow: all I need to know is this: does Lucia think Eugene Ware a through ticket to happiness with no stop-overs?"

She regarded her needle intently.

"It makes me feel ashamed to talk like the words to sheet-music, but this is too important to stand on dignity so I ask in plain words, is she really and truly and forever in love with this—shall I say lobster?"

"One thing I am sure of," Virgie said at last; "the marriage will take place the first of June. Many things may happen before two-and-a-half months pass, but nothing ever happens to

change Eugene Ware's mind; and Lucia wouldn't break her word, even if she wanted to."

"If they think everything of each other, of course it ought to come off. All right, then, I'll head the young gentleman up to the main aisle of the church and stop the fight against the minister. I guess that's the point of the thorn. And now—another thing. I need your help. It has come to me that I'm not suitably dressed for the scion of a royal house of Lagville. But the governor doesn't notice anything except that he has his boy again, and Lucia is afraid of hurting my feelings by making suggestions. It'll occur to you that I ought to consult my sister in these domestic matters, but I just can't. I want to appear the proper thing, but I can't ask her opinion. See? Of course it's pride or some other ignoble feeling that makes me want, all the time I'm with her, to keep keyed up to concert pitch. Now with you, Virgie, I don't know why, but I can let down my e-string and be as comfortable as you please. It comes to me that we are going to be the best friends on the river. You've seen how I could talk to you about Eugene Ware and all that. It would choke me if I started it with Lucia. Now take a good look at me and say what's the matter. My difficulty is that I feel so awfully complete. If I knew of anything I needed, I'd go buy it. Yet all the time I can see that your mother is weighing me and finding me nothing but a handwriting on the wall."

For the first time in a long while, Virgie laughed aloud. Her mother who happened to be passing down the hall, looked in and said, "Mercy, child! how noisy you are. And how you are stooping over! Please sit straighter, Virginia."

Virgie cringed and Mrs. Abbottsfield passed

on. John urged, "Let's take it right up where we bit off the thread."

She recovered much quicker than was her wont. "My advice is, consult Brother Tredmill—everybody in town calls your minister 'Brother' whether of his church or not. Brother Tredmill will tell you exactly how you should be dressed."

"Oh, I say! Look here: is he a man as well as a minister?"

"Really, John, I want you to consult him; you'll never regret it."

"But wouldn't it be an impertinence to ask him to clothe both the inner and the outer man? No? Then I'll see him this very evening. Now, another thing; the way I express myself— You must understand that I like my way. But your mother doesn't. I want to express myself in such a way as to give the password to the best families. Look here: when you and I are together, couldn't you give me a few points? And when there's a crowd about, every time I let out something that I think particularly good when it isn't, couldn't you put up your hand as if to smooth your hair? It might give you the arm ache the first few days, but I'm quick to get onto all sorts of new curves. Will you play my short-stop? You see I have a part to fill as John Lyle Warring that I've had no chance to rehearse. But if you will sit behind the flies with the prompter's book, I know I can work through without falling over the footlights."

Virgie glowed with excitement. Into her drab life something had entered to stir her heart as she had not dreamed it could be stirred. She could not remember she was ugly when he was with her, therefore lost the look of discontent and the slump of indifference

that did much to make her aspect forbidding.

"Virgie," he asked abruptly, "do you think I resemble the governor?"

She corrected him: "Father."

"Yes, certainly; him."

"He is so broken," she murmured; "not really old; but old-looking."

"Yes, but did I ever look like him? You never believed from the first that I looked like his picture on the wall."

"I never looked like my mother," Virgie sighed.

"I don't look like that picture. I'm all different. But there's something I *can* get onto—"

Virgie put her hand to her hair and he laughed, but the next moment grew very serious.

"There's something I mean to accomplish—with your help. I am going to look like that picture before I leave this house—I mean, before I die, you understand. Not the features, that isn't it, but the expression; I want to be like that; a gentleman. Not that I doubt I'm a gentleman, but I want to *show* the gentleman, and show it so unmistakably that I won't have to watch myself doing it. You can't see that my hair and eyes and nose and mouth and chin are like those in the wall-picture. Neither can I. But I want you one day to be able to say that in spite of the difference, I'm like that picture on the wall. All this, not for my sake but *his*; and Lucia's."

There was an eagerness in his frank eyes, a wistfulness about his lips, that touched her deeply. He stretched out his hand and she took it impulsively. "I'm not so sure," she told him, "but there's a little resemblance already."

CHAPTER XII

SOMETHING HAS HAPPENED

As yet the village had not been formally presented to John because his "father" and "sister" wanted him all to themselves, but naturally everybody had heard about the recovered heir and smiled in neighborly fashion on passing the yard-gate. Though he had not been off the place, he had no difficulty, that evening, in finding the boarding-house where the Rev. Harry Tredmill lodged. The landlady knew at first glance who he was because, as she said, he looked like his father, but in reality because he was the only stranger in the village.

She sent him upstairs where the minister had two rooms, a library with a bedroom in the rear. John found it unnecessary to introduce himself and was rejoiced to find in his host a man to whom one instinctively opened his heart. Tredmill was young and rather serious-minded with a rich ministerial atmosphere in his speech and intonation. He was thoroughly sincere and somewhat worn out in his intense desire to uplift a world determined not to be uplifted. One saw clearly enough that there was no affectation in him. He could not say "Sunday" like other men, for to him it was solely "Sabbath," and his promises were conditioned by consent of the Divine Will. Many of his forms of speech had been worn smooth from having so often been jingled in ecclesiastical usage, but when he cast them down in exchange somehow they rang true.

Even if he had not been normally of a trust-

ful nature, it would have been impossible to resist John's ingenuous confidence. "You see how it is, Brother Tredmill: nobody at home but women and an old gentleman who's let himself down. All my togs are brand-new, but something's wrong. I want you to go with me early in the morning and fit me out for the race."

"Surely, surely." The minister seemed to understand everything by instinct, to appraise at full value the reasons for John's ignorance of form, to think it natural that he should be consulted rather than one of the family. That was one reason why people liked to confide in the young minister; his sympathetic understanding came to meet them at the door of their reserve.

John warmed to him. "I knew if you were anything like the description Miss Virgie Abbottsfield had painted, we'd get along fine. You're going to find me your right-hand bower at all the Wednesday and Sunday meets. Now that's all right, Brother Tredmill, don't thank me, the pleasure's all mine. I'll be glad to help you along by filling up as much of a pew as I can spread over. How's your attendance kept up, anyhow? Maybe I can help."

"I regret to say, Brother Warring, the attendance leaves much greatly to be desired. I find particular trouble among the men and boys. I've toiled day and night—however, it's not for me to speak of my labors. It seems that the young men cannot be induced to help build up the kingdom."

"I'll get 'em there, set your mind on something else."

The minister regarded him not hopefully. "I think I have tried every method of reaching the uninterested."

"I'll herd 'em in. You be thinking what to hand them when I've got 'em bunched together with the bars up. You can get a mob to do almost anything the first time. But if they come again, it's because they want to—see?"

After he had bade him good-by, John turned back from the head of the stairs. "Look here, Brother Tredmill, you and I are going to be friends, and between friends there shouldn't be any gate nailed up in the fence. As anxious as you are to build up your business—why haven't you been to see my governor?"

A slight color stained the thin cheeks, but Tredmill answered with his usual gentleness: "I was turned from the door with orders from your father never to come again. It is an inexplicable thing that he should have taken so violent an antipathy to me that the mere mention of my name sets his heart to palpitating dangerously."

"I suppose that's what Mr. Glaxton told you?"

"He verily did. He met me there at the door and later came here to explain the situation. He behaved in a gentlemanly manner but I could perceive that he is a sadly worldly man. A very, very worldly man."

"You didn't mention this to Lucia?"

"I could not wound her; and it would have been to no purpose."

John slowly went back to the minister's study. "Look here, Brother Tredmill, what do you know about this man Glaxton?"

"Of course," with constraint, "you know he is your father's cousin."

"It seems we can't get out of that. I've examined the Bible-files. But that's nothing. There's more solid meat in abusing your rela-

tives than other people, so if you know anything about Glaxton, hand it over."

Tredmill shook his solemn head. "He stays very closely at home—I mean your father's home—except when abroad on business for your father, who for some time has been able to look after none of his affairs. Mr. Glaxton has been given power of attorney; he directs everything."

John muttered, "And has been given power of conscience too, apparently." Suddenly he pounced upon a new topic. "What about this Eugene Ware? Don't think strange that I should drag in the family, for you know more about it than I do. A few days ago I didn't know I had it. Is he worthy of Lucia?"

"His reputation is good. I think his tastes are not your sister's tastes; they are very unlike but I hope they may find true happiness. It is possible that happiness is the easier realized when two people look at it from different life-angles."

John slyly hinted, "Haven't had experience in that line?"

Tredmill flushed and laughed with sudden boyishness. "Not yet—but soon, I hope," he exclaimed, looking like a man who has temporarily emerged from his official capacity.

John grasped his hand. "I wish I could say, 'Here too,'"

Tredmill confided bashfully, "She's a great friend of your sister's and occasionally visits her for a week or so at a time—she lives in a distant city."

"Is the church willing? I know more about religion than some people imagine. What about the old cats?"

The other's countenance fell. He started to say something, then checked himself. He was

too honest to pretend not to understand. At last he admitted "It is verily a difficult situation."

John fixed him with his bright eye. "What about the choir?"

"Oh!" Tredmill groaned, clasping his head with both hands.

John went home feeling that his hands were full. He must watch Glaxton—the lawyer, cousin though he undoubtedly was, must be a cold and bloodless schemer to have installed himself in the bosom of the family that he might systematically deceive his benefactor. And there was Eugene Ware, evidently a hard-headed, unsympathetic merchant, refusing to accommodate himself to the ardent desires of his betrothed—after marriage he would prove as unyielding as granite. He regretted that Lucia should be engaged to any one. He would have liked to think of her as a sweet unattached spirit caring for no one more than she did for him. However, since she had given her heart, it was his brotherly duty to make sure that it had been worthily received.

These two tasks, he told himself, were as important as they were difficult and in some degree justified the deception practiced upon J. L. Warring. However, on reaching home he found that something had happened which caused him to forget to seek excuses for impersonating the kidnapped heir. Instead, he clung to his role from the sheer instinct of self-preservation.

CHAPTER XIII

SAFE FOR THE PRESENT

In the spacious Warring reception hall he found awaiting him the three women of his new family, all in a high degree of excitement. Any such general change of countenance was enough to arouse fear of discovery; he seemed to breathe danger on the very air and he braced himself, his determination not to look afraid causing him to overshoot the mark. His manner was debonair as he gazed first upon one then upon another, at the same time from intense nervousness balancing himself queerly upon the farthest points of his heels, a feat as difficult as it was void of grace. Sustained thus in all unconsciousness, he made a miraculous presentation that might have caused a stranger to seek above his head for sustaining wires.

Virgie, mindful of her part as prompter, put her hand desperately and very obviously to her hair.

John caught the gesture and said blankly, "But I haven't said a word."

"Brother," Lucia hastily interposed, "please sit down." She turned to Mrs. Abbottsfield who was eyeing John with astonishment. "Let's all sit down, Aunt Hildegarde." Then to John: "Father retired early and we are exceedingly glad of it, for we've had a strange interview that would have disturbed him dreadfully."

"Strange interview?" repeated John, striving to appear calm, but so certain that Blear-

stead had been in that hall during his absence that he threw his weight on the back legs of his chair and strove desperately to shift the burden to a single leg. "How do you mean?"

"Two dreadful men were here."

John said to himself, "Not only Blearstead, but Cleek!"

Mrs. Abbottsfield shuddered. "We never expected to be brought into contact with such creatures. John—they were *detectives*!"

He grew a dull red. "What were the villains doing here?"

"Brother," Lucia cried with animation, "you'd have laughed if you could have heard them."

"Would I? Oh, yes, of course I would. Detectives, you say? No doubt they were amusing. What did they have to talk about?"

"They claimed to have traced a young man to this town—and really, he must have come to Lagville the same day you came. As soon as he got off the train he called for a suitcase at the express office and hasn't been seen since. The amusing thing was that they thought you might be that young man."

"No wonder you imagined I'd have laughed to hear that!"

"Yes. At first it was hard to make them understand anything. I had always read that detectives are immensely clever, but these two men must be very poor specimens of their profession. They were determined that you should be that young man! We had to describe your very clothes to show that you didn't come to Lagville dressed as their escaped prisoner—that's what their young man is, an escaped burglar."

"Where are these blockheads?"

"They were determined to wait here to see

you," Lucia cried indignantly. "They showed us pictures of the wretch they're hunting and wanted to know if you looked like them. Of course there wasn't the slightest resemblance. At last Aunt Hildegarde showed them father's picture on the wall. She explained that you were the living image of that portrait. Then they said their man didn't look anything like that, and they went away."

"And I told them," Virgie cried, "that although you've traveled about so much, you've never been to Kansas City, for you told us so. The person they are after *lives* in Kansas City with his uncle."

"Virginia," her mother murmured, "your voice is so sharp. Do soften it."

"Did they fall for what you said?"

Virgie smoothed her hair.

"My meaning was this." John collected his bewildered wits: "Did they accept your statements without reserve?"

Virgie said oracularly, "They did and they didn't."

"Oh, I see," he murmured, compressing his lips in intense thought. "That's a very nice distinction. Where are they now?"

"But *Virgie!*" Lucia protested. "They were perfectly convinced. They ran from here to catch the train back to Kansas City."

"Virgie," her mother complained, "one never knows how to take you."

"Virgie," John said with gentle desperation, "what do you mean by your 'do' and your 'don't'?"

"They went away," Virgie conceded, "but I thought they looked as if they might come back. I'm hoping they'll find their burglar somewhere else. But if they don't, I believe they'll come here again."

"Let them come," Lucia flashed.

"Yes," John agreed. "I should say it might be a good thing to train Simmons to deal with the scamps. Simmons looks like he could do for a couple of detectives. Just what are they trying to find, anyway?"

"It's a man named John Walters, a house-breaker and thief, a terrible desperado, the very one— But I haven't told you about that." She smiled at him with sudden tenderness, and in his joy at the sunshine that danced in her eyes beneath the golden hair, his danger suddenly seemed infinitely remote.

"There is so much I haven't told you yet," she went on. "We're so *new* to each other! Anyway, my dearest friend—after Virgie—lives in Kansas City: Alice Klade—you seem to have heard of her."

"For the second I thought I had," he gasped, swallowing hard.

"You read of her in the dreadful newspapers, of course. The man the detectives were looking for is the John Walters who broke into her home less than a week ago. She woke up to find him standing near her bed with, oh, such a terrible look in his eyes!"

"Good heavens!" John ejaculated, "is *that* your friend? I mean the lady. Yes, I read all about it. Very interesting reading matter. But—I *say*! And you actually *know* her!"

She laughed at his rueful amazement. "We're intimate. You'll find that I know other famous people, if I do live in a little town lost on the riverbank! Poor Alice nearly died from terror right then and there."

"But I didn't gather that he was so dreadful," John protested. "The papers called him the Polite Burglar."

"You know how the papers distort facts. Alice says he was perfectly frightful. But he went away without murdering her as she expected. Of course that was polite in him!"

"I think you're pretty hard on him," Virgie objected. "As an abandoned outcast of society it seems that he behaved rather decently."

John smiled at her somewhat grimly. "It seems to be one of your cases of 'did' and 'didn't.' "

Lucia smiled at him. "Alice is coming on the fifteenth of next month to spend a week." Then she blushed slightly, imagining he would in some way connect the proposed visit with her approaching marriage. She hurried on. "And when she comes we'll have her tell us all about it and minutely describe her uninvited midnight caller."

John started up, looking to right and left, then with a deep breath reseated himself. In answer to their surprised looks he murmured, "I was thinking of going somewhere— But I've concluded to stay where I am."

CHAPTER XIV

LUCIA IN THE MOONLIGHT

John planned to stay in Lagville until the day before Alice Klade's visit. This would give him a week to find out whether or not Glaxton was bent upon evil designs. Convinced that the lawyer was a dangerous schemer, it helped to reconcile him to his anomalous position in the household to think of frustrating his schemes, then vanishing just before the arrival of her who must recognize in him her "Polite Burglar." If he could drive Glaxton away before his escape, doubtless the village would recall the adage that it takes a thief to catch a thief. He would be remembered as a rascal who, after all, was not wholly bad and this seemed the best he could expect from the verdict of the world. In the meantime he would act as if unmenaced by the slightest danger.

Changes in his dress and manner were astonishing. So scrupulously did he imitate the Rev. Harry Tredmill with whom much of his spare time was passed, that his tone of voice and at times his very choice of words betrayed the ministerial touch; in the meantime Virgie did much to eliminate slangy phrases of which he was overfond and unconventional poses involving the pocketing of one's hands. It was like learning a new science, and John pursued it with the same enthusiasm he had devoted to his other studies. In the seclusion of his room, while breathing in the atmosphere of its refinement, he tried to match himself in

thought and outward showing with the books and pictures—the thousand objects that seemed so natural here but which would have appeared astounding in Blearstead's Eating House.

Hours were spent with his "father" in going over plans bearing upon his career—the launching of big business affairs of which, as soon as possible, he was to be the head. It was all like a fairy tale, and despite his resolution to banish the future from his scheme of things, often his heart was wrung when it flashed over him how tremendous must be the other's disappointment when he should vanish into thin air.

A few evenings after the coming of the detectives, a reception was given at the Warring mansion in John's honor. It was a great and rare event in Lagville, so long had it been since the millionaire had appeared among his friends. Everything was done to honor the returned heir whom the village folk received without reserve, first for the sake of his family, then almost from the first moment because of his genial friendliness. He had the magic of rousing spring-memories in the aged, and bringing a warm glow to the hearts of the lonely.

The occasion lingered in his memory as a series of pictures of Lucia. First, here was Lucia coming down the stairs to him before the first arrival, so wonderfully dressed that she seemed a new wonder with every bit of the old wonder preserved but somehow transfigured; a smiling Lucia, a gloriously radiant Lucia before whom he was very shy. And when the orchestra from a neighboring town was filling the air with delicious strains to mingle with the murmur of happy voices, the

sight of this wonderful Lucia all creamy white and blue and gold, made him unutterably sad. But when later he found her sequestered in a fern-nook with a man he never could appreciate at his real value because he was her accepted lover, John lost his shyness. Afterwards, he and Lucia were in that nook, he hardly knew how except that she had read and helped his wish, and Eugene Ware was gone. He tried to be to her only a brother and certainly never once did she regard him in any other light. But sometimes he wondered—and long after that reception-night, he dreamed strange dreams.

His "father" had resumed his old-time habit of spending two afternoon hours in the bank, now with John to bear him company; and he was never prouder than when they set forth for church, Lucia's father in the middle while Mrs. Abbottsfield and Virgie followed to the corner where they turned off to their particular denomination. In Lagville, congregations were small, but there were as many denominations to be found as anywhere.

The Rev. Mr. Tredmill could hardly believe his eyes on the second Sunday when a long line of young fellows trooped rather sheepishly down the aisle and filled the front bench which not even the most seasoned attendant could be induced to occupy. He glanced involuntarily toward John but received no sign from that serious-faced worshiper, nor did the young men once glance back at him. After the benediction they passed John in the yard as if they had never seen him before and when Mr. Warring called back the son of one of his old friends to present him to "my boy," they shook hands with solemn ceremony, and were "glad to know" each other.

If the acquirement of "good form" was like a course in education, John felt, toward the end of the month, that he was crowned with a diploma by the finality of Lucia's high praise. They were seated on the front steps in the moonlight where she had been lightly touching the guitar to his many songs, wonderful songs in ragtime that made one's feet twitch without reaching one's brain. He was always urging her to "join in," but she could only shake her head. Impossible as it seemed, she had never heard them.

Suddenly he had an inspiration: "But you're bound to know, 'Hold Me Tight, O Honey Boy, Hold Me Tight.' When I left, everybody in the best houses and every kid on the streets of Kan—wait, my tongue slipped—in San Francisco was warbling it." But the tremendous success even of "Hold Me Tight" had not caused a ripple on the placid waters of Lagville's musical current and a deep sweet silence fell upon them broken only by the fitful whispering of the chords as Lucia fingered the strings ever so lightly—those same chords which could do duty for ten thousand songs.

Somehow the guitar seemed the voice of the moonlight, while the moonlight became the visible image of Lucia's beautiful youth. The world was bathed in a silver glory not because a dead world swung high in the sky but because a young girl sat on the steps, music slipping from under her finger tips. John felt words forced from his husky throat:

"Lucia, do you really love that Eugene Ware?" But he would have withheld the question could he have known how the sound of the words would start his heart to violent throbbing.

Her hand fell across the strings and lay very

still while a minor vibration whispered plaintively under its weight. Her face lost much of its light although the moonlight was full upon her hair. A cloud had passed over her spirit. At last she said, "I think so."

"Why?" he inquired somewhat breathlessly.

She shook her head.

"He doesn't like the things you like," John persisted. "He'll never be interested in what interests you. I've been giving him a close study, of course in a perfectly proper way and I think I could get my grades on figuring out his sum-total. I wouldn't say a word if I thought you knew your own mind. I hate to see you taking such awful chances. I can't find anything in Eugene Ware but drygoods. He thinks drygoods and he *is* drygoods. Of course he makes a living that way, a good one, but what's the use of his living? I mean, if you don't really love him. Lucia, should you ever change your mind about that—that young man, don't keep it to yourself till it's too late."

Such a long silence succeeded these impetuous words, that he grew cold. "You're angry with me," he lamented, "and no wonder. But I couldn't help saying it. I had the feeling that it ought to be said, that nobody else would do it, and that if I lost your confidence it couldn't be helped—I'm not important anyway. But you are all there is; that's the way I feel about you, Lucia; if you can get my meaning—you're all there *is*. And there's nothing in the world I'd put up a more desperate fight over than your happiness. It's just as I said—to me there isn't anything else *in* the world."

Then she turned to look into his pleading face and he saw that she was not angry. Presently she began speaking in a soft, hesitating

voice utterly unlike her usual crispness of utterance, sweet and deeper with magic music than the strains from the guitar which filled in her brief pauses. "I think I do— It never occurred to me that I really didn't until you asked the question; a little while ago. It wouldn't have seemed that I ought to ask myself after giving my promise. The time for questions was then— But I think I do. It might be because—because there wasn't any one else. There are so few people in Lagville—hardly any young men; they go to the city before they're grown and of course Eugene is above all those stranded here. That's how they seem to me; stranded. But Eugene is energetic, and he has made it pay to live in the village. He has enterprise and—you know he is considered very successful. And I haven't had any one here at home to compare him with—until you came."

John groaned. "I wish you had a standard worthy of you to compare him with so you could see just how high he measures."

"Dear brother, you are so wonderful to me. When I consider the terrible disadvantages you've labored under all your life long—how you've struggled for refinement—it must have been the instinct of race drawing you up—the Warring blood—and how you've kept yourself fine and honorable in all sorts of surroundings—and since you've come here, your genius of fitting into our kind of life—and fitting into our hearts, filling the empty places that were always there before you came— When I consider all this, I tell myself I can't expect to meet any one your equal. You are going to be a brilliant man, a man of wide affairs, the man father has yearned for at the head of his business. I can't expect Eugene to be like

that—he hasn't your quickness and imagination. And besides, you're the handsomest boy I ever saw and the sweetest to all sorts of people. I'd have fallen in love with you just from the way you've brightened up poor Virgie; and put heart into our minister; and made a new man of father; and shown me what it means to be alive in this beautiful world. And I know it isn't fair to Eugene to compare him to you, for you're like nobody else in the world. So I mustn't let myself get dissatisfied. My word is given and you must help me to believe that it cannot be broken. I must believe that all is for the best."

Her words had sunk so deep in his heart that they had carried all power of speech below the surface. Presently he rallied with, "Let's hope so. That's the sort of cold comfort I try to give myself when I think of my own engagement."

"Oh!" She gave a sharp exclamation and dropped the guitar. "Oh!" she gasped again, "I'm afraid it's broken."

"No—just one of the heart-strings." He replaced it gently upon her knees.

Her head was turned aside so all he could catch was the silver sheen on the glowing hair. "But what did you mean?" she faltered.

"There's a girl up the river I think a good deal of, and she likes me. Her father's a pretty hard case, up to any kind of rascality as a side-line but his main business is fishing. However, Bettie's an awfully nice girl and pretty, too. Yes, prettier than just pretty. I wish you could see her running along the river-beach bare-headed and barefooted—that's poetry, Lucia. Lots of people think they don't like poetry but that means only that they don't care to read it. When you can look at

it, why, it's different. A fellow may not be a Shakespeare but he couldn't help feeling an ode or a lyric of some sort on seeing Bettie wading in after the boat with the water glistening on her."

Lucie protested vehemently, "But you could never marry a girl of *that* sort. She wouldn't know how to adapt herself. And a father such as you describe! Oh, John, surely, surely you are not bound to her?"

"We are not precisely engaged unless a letter I left with her does the work. But we've been chums for years. Her mother was my—I mean she was always good to me. She's the only girl I ever kissed when I said good-by—Well, of course she isn't in your class, but it's not fair to compare her to you. I don't mind saying I've never seen a girl, and never expect to see one, who wouldn't go into eclipse every time you smiled. I'll admit right now that my wife can never be the woman my sister is."

She clasped his hand. "But I don't want to think of your having a wife at all," with a sigh. "Why not be satisfied just as you are? That's the way I'll always like you best." She rose with sudden energy. "It's getting late. I'm going to tell you good-by." Before he could rise she stooped over him, resting one hand upon his shoulder. "I want you to break your record, John," she said with a sudden flashing, teasing smile. "Bettie mustn't continue to be the only girl you ever kissed when you said good-by."

John rose with a laugh and patted her hand. "If I never marry, may I come to live with you and Eugene?" he asked lightly.

She did not respond to his laugh for it lacked contagious quality, and they parted rather awkwardly without the good-by kiss.

CHAPTER XV

THE BROKEN ENGAGEMENT

A few days later, after intense hours devoted to his problem, John sought the Ware Dry-goods Emporium and invited the proprietor to a corner behind a high rampart of shoe-boxes where confidences were possible.

Eugene Ware was six or seven years his senior, a good-looking, dry man, immensely absorbed in business—without curiosity. He had visited John and been visited by him and it was not in nature for him to catch sight of the other without feeling the burden of the hours thus dragged through the dust of labored small-talk. Eugene could not sustain his end of any conversation not dealing with the buying, selling or handling of goods. Without general information and utterly lacking interest in such ideas as had been crammed into his head at high school, he looked upon a ready talker as an inferior, and held ideals in suspicion. To drive a bargain he was prodigal with words, but had not one with which to sweeten life, and he spent much of the time while calling upon Lucia in dark, dense silence shot through occasionally by monosyllabic responses to the vivacious girl of his choice. Lucia sometimes comforted herself with the reflection that after they were married it would not be necessary to try to think of something to say; life would be freer without the nightmare-heaviness of his visitations.

"Look here, Eugene, I guess it's a little out of order, but considering my connection with

the family, I hope you'll take no exception to a few candid remarks.

"Yes, yes," responded Eugene who hated anything out of order and instantly became on guard when anybody else spoke of candor.

"Has it occurred to you that Lucia is pretty young to get married? Strikes me a girl ought to see more of the world first, to find out what sort of people are in it. Of course you and I are all right—but there are others. I don't like the thought of her marrying so early and you might as well know how I feel about it."

"Yes, yes," Eugene responded looking slightly flabbier than usual. He could say "Yes, yes" in a dozen different ways, all of them objectionable to John, and no way was more nerve-racking than when he meant, "No, no."

"Of course I don't blame you for thinking otherwise; that's your point of view. But what I have to consider is not you but Lucia. Perhaps you think that, though I am her brother, I haven't been long on the job. True I haven't seen much of her, but I've seen a great deal of the world. I know men; and I know when they're like you, so much older than the girls they want to marry, there's mighty little chance of happiness for either when the man isn't willing to yield one inch to the girl's wishes—or, if you want to call it so, whims. I don't know but you and Lucia might do well enough if you'd consider her likes and dislikes, but as long as you hold to a straight line that isn't her line and can't be induced across it, seems to me the prospect is pretty dark."

"For instance," Eugene said, toying with the upper boxes, "what are you thinking of as my 'line'? I didn't know I had one. It's a man's place to run the business, and the woman's

place to run the home—if you call that a ‘line.’ Lucia isn’t ten years younger than myself, and if you’ll permit a few candid remarks of my own, you’re talking nonsense. Whatever Lucia wants I want. Nobody was ever more yielding than I am. I agree to everything.” Suddenly he lost his flabby look and grew red. “If you weren’t her brother I should call this intolerable.”

“Naturally I didn’t come here to quarrel, but I did come to let you know my opinion. Eight or nine years make a great difference, when the man won’t accommodate himself to the girl’s prejudices. Now for an instance, since you ask for one: you are working to drive Brother Tredmill out of town. I don’t care what your attitude toward religion is, but my sister is fond of her church. You are always opposing her. It may seem a little thing; but if you can’t yield to Lucia in little things, then the difference between your ages is too big a thing to be smoothed away.”

“You said you didn’t come here to quarrel with me. Then looks are deceiving. Tredmill is a dead one. I won’t say he hasn’t acted from good motives, but he has meddled in the affairs of Lagville and has openly spoken of some things that don’t sound well. We men propose to lead our own lives in our own way and it’s none of Tredmill’s business how we lead them. You are hardly in a position to talk to me about religious matters. From what I’ve heard you got the gang to church by pitching horseshoes with the boys!”

“I’m not talking about religious matters. I’m discussing your warfare on Lucia’s minister. That’s my only point. Look here, old fellow,” suddenly his tone altered to frank entreaty, “let up on Brother Tredmill. Upon my

word he means well, as you admit; and it's worrying Lucia dreadfully to know that if he loses his place you'll be largely responsible."

"Yes, yes," Eugene applied the brakes on his growing resentment, for it was with him a maxim that ill-humor is bad for business. "Well, well!" But though his manner grew docile, he had really hardened as the other softened. "Am I to understand," he asked dryly, "that you represent your sister in this curious interview? Has she sent me her orders that I am to embrace her preacher?"

John turned from him without a word. He was too angry to treat himself to the luxury of self-expression.

His visible emotion amused the merchant. "Do wait one moment," Eugene called. "I can talk over the telephone without being overheard. I'll get your sister."

John waited with his back turned. He was deeply annoyed by the course matters had taken, but could not bring himself to attempt further conciliation.

". . . Is that you, Lucia? I have just had a remarkable conversation with your brother. Did you know he was coming to call on me at the store?"

"No," came Lucia's response. faint, agitated.

"Well, it doesn't matter. The point is, he thinks the difference in our ages and tastes is so great that it would be a mistake for us to marry. I am wondering if you could possibly agree with him?"

John wheeled about, throwing up a hand in protest. "Wait, Eugene, let us talk this thing over fairly and soberly."

Paying no heed to the expostulation, Eugene pressed the receiver to his ear. John watched

his face pass from a flaming red to a milky pallor.

Lucia answered, "I perfectly agree with my brother. It was a mistake, Eugene; the only good thing about it is that we have found out in time. . . . I am so sorry—"

John could hear every word distinctly before the receiver fell.

Without glancing at John who remained with hand uplifted as if deprived of the power of motion, Eugene fumbled for the receiver, restored it to the fork and went to wait upon a customer, still pale, but otherwise his phlegmatic self.

CHAPTER XVI

BURIED TREASURE

John, deeply agitated, went for a long walk in the country hoping the situation would clear up for him with quiet meditation; but he could not compose his mind to quietness. On reaching the deserted cattle-shed where he had changed clothes on first coming to Lagville—he had taken that direction unconsciously—confusion deepened while uneasiness over what ought to be done caused a violent throbbing of his head. Fate seemed to have led him back to the days of Blearstead and Bettie Hode as if to give warning that from his past there was no escape.

Other lonely roads led from the river through dense woodlands and upspringing meadows where the tender wheat showed its faithful pledge of living green, but they brought no counsel. It was almost dusk when he reached home. Lucia who had been watching for him was in the reception hall as he came through the door.

"Brother!" She threw her arms about his neck and pressed her cheek against his coat-sleeve. He stood very still, not even stroking her hair. "Brother!" her voice quivered with emotion, "I am so glad, so glad, so *glad!*" He thought he knew what she meant, yet was afraid to ask.

She gave him instant reassurance. "It was always a mistake. But I shouldn't have known it until too late if you hadn't come. John, I never loved him. I never, never loved

him. I cannot imagine now how I ever could have imagined even for an hour that I did. The part of me that admired his success, his determination—the part of me that found him agreeable and pleasant to look at and comforting to have near seems to have been cut away. Isn't it wonderful! As if I'd been through an operation. And was healed. But if you hadn't come, I'd still be in darkness. I'd have gone on in my darkness. We'd have married. Then when you came, as of course finally you must have come, I'd have waked up. How dreadful not to have known the truth until too late!"

She had grown so excited that he tried to sooth her with commonplace words, but she put them aside. "I can't understand," she rushed on; "it's from being with you that I've realized what it would mean all my life to—to be with *him*." She began to sob, but he knew they were tears of happiness.

"It's all over now," she gasped between long breaths, "and spring is here. That's the way I think about it; spring is here—and you. Today has been so beautiful—such wonderful colors, and odors of earth and grass, and the shadows of first-leaves flickering so faintly on the ground, to and fro. You'll think me a foolish girl who doesn't know her mind, but this is the way I think of it—the engagement is ended and spring is here. There'll never be such a wonderful spring as this spring. I owe it to you, you wonderful handsome deliverer!"

She gazed up at him through shining eyes. "Yes, and I can see how glad you are too, Mr. John Warring, though you think it for my good and for your own dignity to appear neutral! It's like a man not to say a word to show how happy he is. Yes, you *are* happy;

you can't hide it! But father mustn't know, not just yet."

She went on breathlessly to explain. A letter had come evidently containing important news; for her father, visibly moved and without revealing its nature, had declared that it would be necessary for him to absent himself from home for at least a week. Since he had not left town for a year and, before John's coming, had not been considered strong enough to leave the house, the announcement that he meant to take the midnight train for Chicago had met with serious remonstrance. Because his vitality had been almost miraculously restored there was no question of his fitness for travel; but the business letter had so manifestly proved disturbing that John concurred in Lucia's opinion; no other trouble should be heaped upon his mind—and it was certain that he would regard the broken engagement as a serious trouble.

After the evening meal which in Lagville was invariably "supper," Mr. Warring invited John to a conference in the room where so many of his days had been spent in bed. The elderly gentleman was plainly nervous and decidedly sketchy in what he sought to communicate. His purpose seemed rather to convey impressions than facts. Through everything shone love and pride in his "son" but with this was mingled something dark as of a dread imperfectly realized. His journey was necessary in order to put to rights some of his lumberyard affairs which he had supposed in perfect condition.

"I want your help, my boy, and I'm trusting you to give it without asking questions. There are some things I cannot understand, yet, if I tried to explain, my words might cause

you to misunderstand. Because I doubt if affairs are always dark when they look dark. Perhaps the difficulty is in our eyes, eh? If we can't see clearly, is it the other fellow's fault if we think his nose crooked?"

He rubbed his shock of gray hair and his lips moved without speech. Then—"It's hard to get at what I want to tell you. Yet in justice to others you must take it without details. Maybe I'll find it easier to show you—"

He went to a landscape painting hanging opposite the light, felt behind the canvas and produced a tiny key. Then he crossed the floor to an oldfashioned leather trunk which stood directly opposite the bed. The key was not meant for the trunk for it was not only unfastened, but stood ajar from some defect in the lid-hinges, showing a crevice of at least an inch between its iron-rimmed jaws.

"This trunk," he said, "is supposed to contain nothing but old letters and souvenirs of my happy married life. Photographs and love-tokens. Look out in the hall, John, and find if Simmons is anywhere about."

John found the hall deserted and came back to look into the trunk which, without its tray, showed a wild confusion of yellowed envelopes, pale-inked notes, fading photographs, bits of ribbon and other driftage of past years.

"No doubt this appears to you in utter confusion," the old man smiled, "but I know exactly what letters and pictures should be on top. I can see that the contents of this trunk have not been disturbed since I last opened it."

"But who should be prowling into your trunk?" John demanded indignantly.

"You never can tell. Now, my boy, dig down through all that mass to the far corner on your right. Feel anything?"

"It's a small metallic box."

Mr. Warring sighed his relief. "Lift it out. You'll not find it heavy. Although," he added anxiously, "it shouldn't be altogether light, I hope it doesn't seem empty to you."

"I think there is something in it. Of course the box alone has a certain weight." He drew to the light a flat oblong shiny-black box. The other tested it in his careful hands and banished half-formed fears.

Mr. Warring snatched up a sofa-cushion and shook the cover empty. "Put the box in this cover; I don't want any one to see what it is."

John, obeying, was startled by sudden darkness. "It's all right," the old man whispered. "I've switched off the light to make sure no one is in Cousin Glaxton's room. There's no light shining under his door."

"You thought Simmons might be spying in there?"

"One never knows— But it's all right. And it's good and dark outdoors. We might as well take the box now. We're going to hide it, son, till I get back from the timber-lands. I know of a splendid place—I've thought it all out, lying in my bed so long—under the summerhouse. I have the spade under the back porch. I wouldn't dare go away leaving the box in the trunk. Put your ear closer: it's filled with banknotes."

"But surely it ought to be deposited in the bank."

"No. There it would get out of my hands. You see Cousin Glaxton manages my account. I can't explain. I know I have this much money and I can't be absolutely certain about the rest. I shall hold on to this, for you and Lucia."

John exclaimed impetuously, "You distrust

that man Glaxton. Why don't you get rid of him? Revoke his power of attorney. Now that I've come home—"

The other grasped his arm in the darkness. "Hush, boy, not so loud. We must not hurry things. Oh, we have to be so cautious, so easy, so slow, and all the time seem so unsuspecting! If he gets a hint that we doubt him, if he finds one inkling that we suspect—he could ruin us all. Of course I mean if he wanted to; if he's bad at heart. But of course we don't doubt him; not really, you know. He has always been so helpful, and knows how to quiet my heart when all the doctors are useless. But we have this box. Whatever comes, we have this box. And besides, of course everything is all right. Hush! Your Cousin Glaxton will be back in the morning. That's why I'm going tonight. He wouldn't let me go if he were here. I'm not telling you my destination nor just exactly why I'm going. That'll make it easier for you to deal with him. You'll simply be at liberty to tell him all you know which is next to nothing—except about this box."

"You shan't fear that lawyer while I'm here," John persisted. "It's none of his business where you go and I'd like to see him try to stop you."

"You don't understand. But you will when you meet him. And he is so helpful and energetic, and kind."

"Would a good man have lied to the minister to drive him from your house?"

"Don't let's talk about him, son. Your Cousin Glaxton isn't a man to be explained. I gave that up long ago." He softly opened the halldoor, then tiptoed back to whisper, "A good while after your

cousin began taking over the management of my business I began to draw in certain funds such as he knew nothing about. He's an incredibly lynx-eyed gentleman but he can't see everything, that's beyond mortal power. I converted all my outside interests to bank-notes. Of course I couldn't hide my farms and forest lands and I seldom ask questions because your Cousin Glaxton abhors questions. And it would never do to antagonize him. Nobody else can quiet my heart. Bear that in mind while I'm away. He's all right. I'm sure he's all right. If he isn't we're ruined. If you're ever tempted to antagonize him, remember that he has the power. That's what he stands for in this house: power. Power over all my properties, but if everything else should be swept away, here's fifty thousand dollars in this box for you and Lucia. It would be a start. It would be something. Come!"

He slipped to the hall door. "The coast is clear. Should we meet any one, keep the box well under your coat."

Through the dim hall and down the stairs John followed, meeting no one. The voices of Lucia, Virgie and Mrs. Abbottsfield reached them from the front room, but they escaped out the back door undetected. From under the porch Mr. Warring secured the spade and waved toward the summerhouse without a word. There was no moon but the stars were bright and an arc-light sent from the street a shaft of white radiance across rosebushes and gravel walks, missing the summerhouse by only a few feet. However, once within the latticed enclosure the two men were safe from general observation.

Instead of relaxing his caution Mr. Warring

grew even more secretive in manner. Never saying a word he crept to a distant corner and by guiding John's hand with his own showed him a loose plank in the floor. They drew it up and the young man dug the hole while the other carried away the loose dirt in a basket which had been hidden in the shrubbery for that purpose. Dense bushes crowded up from a garden walk to the back of the rustic structure, a thicket which in the early weeks of May formed an unbroken wall of white blossoms.

While John dug he followed with strained hearing every subdued sound of the old man's progress to and fro and once his nerves quivered as from an electric shock on hearing something he feared could not have been the other's footstep. It came from the thicket and he darted around the summerhouse much to the confusion of his "father" who had not caught the alarm.

"Somebody's spying upon us," John whispered with conviction. He plunged into the thicket but it was darkened by the house and no sign was discovered of a spy.

"You must have been mistaken," the other urged. "Trust me to hear anybody trying to find my precious box. There's no other spot so good for its hiding-place."

John admitted, "My nerves are a little on edge." After the box was safely stowed away and all traces of their labor removed, they returned to the house as silently as they had left it.

As they stepped upon the back porch, Simmons came out from the corridor. "What do you want?" Mr. Warring demanded with unwonted brusqueness.

"Excuse me, sir, but the motor-bus has come to take you to the station."

"Ah, thank you." He hurried through the house, calling good-bys to everyone. The women ran out from the parlor and there ensued the confusion incident to the departure of one unused to travel.

"But where's my son?" called Mr. Warring, half-way down the front walk. "I've got to give him a hug."

"I'll give it to him for you," Lucia promised with a swift uprushing of the spirits. To Virgie she whispered, "If you only knew what I know!" She felt the spring scattering blossoms in its warm wind over her heart.

While his "father" had hurried after his suitcase, John had stopped in the back corridor, then turned and tiptoed to the door. Simmons had pulled from under the porch-floor the spade where Mr. Warring had hastily flung it, and was feeling the stained edge with deft sensitive fingers. It was this discovery that caused the young man almost to miss telling the traveler good-by. However, he reached the car before it left the gate and received from Mr. Warring not only a hug but a hearty kiss which he accepted with his bright affectionate smile.

John had finished burying the box in its owner's favorite hiding-place simply to calm his mind, not at all convinced that he had been startled by a false alarm. He believed some one in the thicket had spied upon them, and the discovery of Simmons thoughtfully examining the spade confirmed his instinctive surmise that Glaxton's confidential servant was the spy. It would be necessary to hide the box in another place but in the meantime something else was even more essential; and

after bidding the family good-night he called Simmons for a private word in the garden.

The man, always polite and soft of voice, looked down from his superior height with a certain air of apology in having the other at a disadvantage.

John began abruptly: "You leave this place at once. Mr. Glaxton brought you here, not because the family needed your services. However, I am going to pay you for your time."

Simmons smiled and responded with unruffled countenance, "Oh, I'm quite sure you don't understand, Mr. John. You see, Mr. Glaxton wouldn't like it at all, not finding me when he comes back.

"It isn't a matter for discussion," John remarked. "You are dismissed, and it merely remains for you to go."

"But I couldn't do it, Mr. John. In the morning when Mr. Glaxton comes, whatever he decides about it will be perfectly all right."

"But you are going now."

"I couldn't think of it, really."

"This moment."

"Mr. Glaxton told me—"

"But you have heard what I've told you. I represent Mr. Warring while he is from home."

"Mr. Glaxton would be very angry. I'm awfully sorry for you to feel this way about me."

"I'm afraid you're going to feel much worse; but I hate to use physical means of persuasion."

"Mr. John, it would be very unbecoming in me to strike you which I would never do unless you jumped on me. Better leave me alone, for I've got to think of Mr. Glaxton. I take my orders from him and he told me to stay."

"Now's the time," remarked John, "for you to think less of Mr. Glaxton than of yourself. Right now is when, as you express it, I jump on you."

He darted forward and the man was unpleasantly shocked out of his supercilious attitude. His advantage of weight and height was more than counterbalanced by the younger man's swiftness and agility while the latter's expert knowledge of athletics gained from Cleek proved determining factors. There were several rushes and counter charges, then all was over; Simmons lay flat upon his back while John's knees bored painfully into his ribs.

"I'll go," Simmons gasped.

John rose, his breath even. "Let's see you. You may get your things."

Simmons rose slowly. "Mr. Glaxton will see about this," he muttered.

"Simmons, don't you know when you're whipped? Must I do it again?"

Simmons went away, cursing futilely under his breath. Determined not to be again spied upon, John made a thorough search of the garden before digging up the box, then doubled every precaution before burying it in a spot much less likely of detection than a corner of the summerhouse.

It was one in the morning when he started for the house, his mind at ease. He had almost reached the porch steps when loud screams from upstairs caused him to drop the spade in dismay. A large figure which in the semi-darkness assumed huge proportions burst through the doorway and came leaping across the back porch straight toward the young man.

"Get out of my way," came a hoarse undertone as John snatched desperately at the intruder's arm. "Ho! So it's you, huh?" The man—it was Blearstead—stopped short and gave a hoarse chuckle. "I hope you've had a companion in your midnight stroll. He'd come in handy, in case you wanted to prove an alibi."

John dropped his arm. His heart was like a lump of ice in his bosom. "What have you done? You mustn't come here again. If you do I'll—I'll give you up to the police, yes, if I have to give myself up at the same time."

Again came the terrified scream from the upper floor.

"I haven't hurt anybody," Blearstead grinned, and John could see his nose twisting from side to side in the old nerve-racking way. "That old woman's scared silly, that's all. But don't you get it into your head, dear nevy, that I'm not coming again. For coming again I am, just as soon as this blows over. Good-night, nevy, and for a little while, good-by."

CHAPTER XVII

THE COMING OF GLAXTON

A few moments—long enough for Blearstead to leap the fence and disappear down the alley—John stood stunned. Then he rushed into the house to find Lucia hysterical over the burglar whose face she had caught reflected in her mirror. Virgie, too, had seen him, but had not cried out.

"Virgie was so brave," Lucia gasped. "She actually ran after him—yes, tried to stop him."

Mrs. Abbottsfield amended her phrase. "Brave? No, reckless; wilfully reckless. She was wickedly reckless!" Her voice rose shrilly. All of them were in their nightrobes and it seemed that with her conventional clothes she had laid aside her careful gentility. Terror rendered her vicious.

"Virgie," she cried, having no other way to vent her emotions roused by the midnight intruder, "you are so *tall*."

In fact, her daughter looked less pleasing than by day; and there was a certain inexplicable solemnity of countenance less natural than the mother's agitation. Of course one instinctively looks solemn over a burglar, but the ghostly figure seemed concerned about something else.

Virgie spoke to John, not with the freedom that usually characterized their intercourse, but with an inscrutable withholding of comradeship, "You hadn't gone to bed."

The dry words were not spoken as a question, yet seemed to call for some sort of explanation

and he had none to offer. He hoped the point would be overlooked.

However, there was something much more dangerous to be faced. The robbery, when published, would bring detectives and other officers of the law, and search would be renewed for the young man who had been seen to leave the train at the Lagville station on the day of John's arrival.

Though profoundly disturbed, John was struck by the immense advantage to which Lucia appeared. Too highly wrought up to think of her disheveled state, her charms were revealed in all the innocence of a little child. His breath was caught in his throat. Bettie running barefooted on the river sands faded so completely from memory's wall that he couldn't even see the spot where the picture had hung.

The vision of Lucia's loveliness was prolonged in the search through the house for missing objects. Blearstead had perhaps slipped through the back door while the box was being buried under the summerhouse—probably it was he, not Simmons, who had made the noise in the shrubbery. If so, doubly important had been the second hiding of the money-box. When an inventory had been made of missing valuables it was found that all the jewelry—a pearl necklace and the diamonds—had been stolen.

John addressed the agitated ladies in his most persuasive manner. He knew, he told them, an expert detective—his life of hardships had cast him among many kinds of people—a detective who would undertake to recover the jewelry provided the theft were kept secret; thus he always worked to best advantage. As sure as the alarm was given, the robber or rob-

bers would dispose of the gems—possibly fling them into the river.

“Don’t say a word about it to any one. I want to be here in the morning when Mr. Glaxton comes; I want to see him. But as soon as that’s over, I’ll go after my man. If Glaxton finds out about it, he’ll interfere. I give you my word that if anybody can get back your things my man can.”

This sounded reasonable, and John was so earnest in asking them to promise secrecy that they agreed amidst sighs and tears. But after that, they remained together for some time overwhelmed by the loss of the wonderful necklace and the diamond rings. John who felt confident of his ability to make quick restoration tried his best to sooth their agitation and bring a smile to Lucia’s lips, and it was not until they separated that he became definitely aware of Virgie’s cool aloofness—Virgie who had not been frightened by the night’s experience and who had never before failed to respond to his kindness.

Perhaps after all she had not been as unafraid as her mother had supposed. If the shock had broken Mrs. Abbottsfield’s veneer to reveal an under-skin of the common man, might it not have imparted to Virgie’s manner a vague trace of hostility? He dismissed the point as exaggerated by his perilous situation and presently forgot even Blearstead. The image of Lucia like the shining of a transfigured face blotted out dark thoughts and in the morning as he lay very still in bed, as if fearful of wrecking a fairy dream. these words slipped from tenderly smiling lips: “What a sister!”

The news failed to arouse his night’s dim uneasiness when it was announced that Virgie had a headache and would not come down to

breakfast. Lucia was there in that intimacy of the family life that gives dearness to the casual word, the unimportant gesture, and Mrs. Abbottsfield was herself again, except for some constraint at the remembrance that she had been rather on exhibition the previous night. This sensitiveness John soothed by dragging in Glaxton for their morning's theme.

"Would it be asking too much to let me face him alone?" he smiled. "I want to get a full-length impression without the different shadings of other people's likes or dislikes.

"You can always have him alone, and welcome," cried Lucia, laughing. "I give you my share in him. Come on, Aunt Hildegarde, be generous!"

"Lucia!" murmured the other, putting up her nose-glasses.

Lucia laughed again. "Don't you say 'the best families to me,' Aunt Hildegarde, after last night!"

When the motor-bus chugged up to the gate, John, watching alone from the parlor, was scarcely surprised to see Simmons alight with his master. Of course he had met the train to make bitter complaint of his ejection.

Simmons took possession of the newcomer's suitcase, but John smiled grimly on finding that he had no intention of advancing with it into the yard. Glaxton waved him forward, but the man-servant shook his head. He would wait outside the gate until his enemy was pacified.

The lawyer lost no time in argument but came briskly up the walk while John from behind the curtain scrutinized him keenly. He was a short, dark man with black hair, heavy eyebrows, a square chin. At first glance one was impressed by the handsomeness of his reg-

ular features; then came the deeper sense of darkness, not only of skin and hair but of spiritual texture. John did not penetrate his mood. It seemed to lack responsiveness, but of that he was not sure. A smile might be lurking behind the keen, deepset eyes or might be utterly lacking from their hidden depths.

The next descriptive epithet that occurred to the observer after "handsome" and "dark" was "unusual." His air of distinction was not such as to warm admiration, but it must catch and hold the most careless eye. Swiftly following up these characteristics came the man's vitality which smote upon one's perceptions as by a blow. He was alive throughout his stoutly-built body and in every brain-cell. He breathed intensive energy, recalling Mr. Warring's term, "power." Handsome—dark—unusual—powerful; there you had Cousin Glaxton.

Before he had come halfway up the walk, John saw the Rev. Harry Tredmill push past Simmons who had the cool impudence to maintain his position in front of the gate. Glaxton was aware that the minister was hastening after him, but made no sign either by slowing or quickening his pace. As he stepped upon the porch, Tredmill at the bottom of the steps protested:

"I beg your pardon—"

Glaxton wheeled around. "Stop where you are," he spoke in a low but cruelly cutting tone. "Really, sir, you should be more considerate of my feelings than to oblige me for a second time to order you off the place."

John appeared at the front door. "How are you, Brother Tredmill?" he called, with aggressive friendliness. The thought that the lawyer might in some inexplicable manner be able to

penetrate the secret of his past gave to the young man an attitude of sheer recklessness. "Come right in. You know you're always as welcome in this house as I am myself."

Tredmill cast him an appreciative glance, then looked steadily at Glaxton whose darkness had increased tenfold, though there was no apparent change of countenance. "I wish to see Mr. Warring on important business."

"My father is not at home," John interposed, "but I'm always glad to see you. My father has left town for some time."

"Then I'll wait. No," in answer to John's insistence, "not now." He turned toward the gate.

John turned upon the lawyer. "And now, who are *you*?" he demanded shortly.

For a moment the other gave him a piercing look that sought to take his measure. Then in full, musically modulated voice, "I am your cousin Edgar Glaxton." He smiled darkly, proffering his hand. "I need not ask who you are. Of course I have heard the news; and the resemblance to your father is obvious. It cries aloud. Like father, like son. And how impetuous you are! Just as your father used to be. I know we shall be excellent friends. This is indeed a pleasure to welcome into our midst the son we have so long mourned as dead."

John let his hand be taken, but his set face did not relax. "It would be a far greater pleasure to me, Mr. Glaxton, if you had not begun our acquaintance by insulting one of my best friends."

"Oh—you mean the parson? As one new to our town, of course you don't understand. He has been hunting out the evils in our community and preaching about them with the hope

of making us better. He drags skeletons from closets in the name of religion. I am not opposed to religion, indeed no. But we cannot tolerate a preacher who makes our religion unpleasant to us. He has made himself obnoxious to the better element, to your father in particular."

"On the contrary, my father esteems him highly."

"I should of course be sorry to have misinterpreted your father's feelings. The fact is your father's state of health, which varies in a way to puzzle all our doctors, determines his opinions for the time being. When he is at his worst, he dislikes what in better health he likes. But there are a few things he dislikes consistently, and I thought this Treadmill was one of them."

"You know my father is devoted to his church."

"I was not aware of it, I assure you. Come, come, John, it isn't possible that a fine young full-blooded fellow like you clings to the old Sunday-school book classifications. You don't believe that the worth-while folk are all in the church, and the bad, bad people are all out of it."

"That's a very convenient classification in Lagville," John said cheerfully. "And you know the old styles are coming back in fashion this year. Before I came here I didn't care any more about religion than you do. I thought of the church as a sort of jail—a place to keep out of. But I've been trying to build me a shack of my own. It's easy for others to see where my lines are crooked and my material shoddy, but the fault's with the carpenter; the level and plumbline are all right. And it's a good thing, I've been thinking, to

have any sort of a roof when it's raining." He waved his arm. "Of course going to church is a novelty to me—I don't know how it'll wear, but for a recreation warranted not to leave a headache or a bad taste in the mouth, it carries the blue ribbon."

John turned from the silent figure to call to Simmons: "I'll let you come on in with that suitcase. And you can stay here as long as Mr. Glaxton stays."

Glaxton shot a glance toward his stalwart servant then at the slight figure of his "cousin" and doubtless concluded that there was less to be hoped for from Simmons and more to be feared from John than appeared on the surface.

In the front room their conversation was continued, though it occurred to neither to sit down.

"I find changes," Glaxton remarked, "since my departure. Best of all," he continued never indicating what emotion, if any, was at play beneath the dark surface, "is naturally your presence among us. It is wonderful. It is almost enough to make one believe in miracles. Cousin John Warring has his son again, dear Lucia her brother."

John added with an inscrutable smile, "And you, your cousin."

"Yes—thank you for saying that. And I find your father's health quite restored. Simmons tells me the heart gives no more uneasiness. How delightful! However, this is not so miraculous; you were sufficient to effect the cure. With you here, he can never be ill again."

"I don't believe he can," John agreed. "I think I'm what the Indians call 'good medicine'—for him, I mean."

"I see. For him; yes." Glaxton shot him a lightning glance from under his heavy brows. He spoke calmly: "Simmons tells me Lucia's engagement to Eugene Ware is broken off. This does not please me. How could it? There is not in the county half so good a match for her. Even before our young men were scattered there was practically nobody but Eugene in Lagville. You will not find such another. I fear this will mean a lonely isolated life for your sister."

John was unable to still a twinge of conscience. The other's words represented his apprehension on quitting the Ware Drygoods Emporium after the fateful interview. He stared from the window frowning from the difficult thoughts that perplexed him whenever Lucia's marriage was discussed as a possibility. It would have been better for her after-years, had he not interfered.

"However," Glaxton sighed, "they may reconsider. Let us hope that they will reconsider."

"I shall hope nothing of the sort." Suddenly John saw the whole matter in the gleam of the moonlight streaming over Lucia with her guitar. "The thing is settled for all time."

Glaxton started back theatrically. "What! you objected? You must have had powerful reasons to practically condemn your sister to a hermit's life."

"She'll not be lonesome if I can help it. We'll be two hermits together."

"But when you go away—"

"I shall not go away."

Glaxton smiled. "Do not be too sure of that, my dear cousin. One never knows what may happen."

John darkened. "When it comes to the matter of Lucia's happiness, it is infinitely

more to me than it could be to you, so please let the subject pass. As to my 'powerful reasons' against Eugene Ware, I cannot claim all the honor of breaking off the engagement, so we'll not discuss that either."

"Quite right, cousin, quite right. I am a little discomfited to find that your father has gone on a journey because I have important matters to communicate to him." He produced his notebook and said quietly, "His address, please?"

"I do not know it. But if the business is pressing, you might communicate it to me."

For an instant the other's brows met ominously, but he was a man of great self-control. He had the manner of carefully suppressing a derisive smile which John found particularly offensive, but when he spoke, his voice was resonant and mild. "Truly the business is pressing. But your father alone could pass upon it authoritatively. Will he be long absent?"

"He left no word on that point, but I can answer more definitely about my own movements. I am leaving on the next train, though I expect to be back in two days—tomorrow, if possible."

"Of course," Glaxton suddenly gave his effect of increased darkness, "I will look after the household while you are away." Slowly he restored the book to his pocket. "May I know how to reach you in case of any accident in Lagville?"

"I'll be on the move most of the time. Better hold my mail till I get back," John smiled easily.

"I see. Quite right. Thank you."

"Besides, with you here, accidents cannot happen," John added politely. He added with

a show of playfulness, "If they did, I should certainly hold you to account."

Glaxton did not respond to this pleasantry. Simmons stopped before the doorway, suitcase in hand. "Take it up to my room, Simmons, and wait there for me." The man vanished noiselessly. The master turned sharply to John:

"You don't like Simmons?"

"Just like that," John smiled. "I must admit prejudice against such a big fellow with such poor fighting capacity. I used to wish I were as tall as that rascal, but bulk isn't everything. Certainly in this instance, there's a good deal of muscle going to waste."

"My dear boy," Glaxton drew down his mouth, "don't let your expert training under athletic masters make you intolerant of those not so fortunate. And by the way—do you find that it keeps you fit to dig in old mother earth?"

"Digging is healthy exercise," remarked John nonchalantly, "but it is healthier for the man with the spade than for anybody watching from the shrubbery." He had instantly divined that Simmons had either seen the first burying of the box, or had guessed it from the spade's condition.

"Quite right. I did see. Did you find out who was watching? Simmons tells me he was in the house when he saw your father throw the spade under the back porch. Simmons says he was not in the shrubbery and he always tells me the truth. That is why I employ him."

There was an easy assurance in the tone that convinced John the watcher after all must have been Blearstead. Simmons could have known nothing of the second burying or of

Blearstead's coming, yet the master was close upon the scent.

John was uncomfortable. He had the impression that if they kept talking, though he uttered the vaguest remarks, the mystery of the money-box and the secret of its key ordinarily kept behind the landscape painting would pass into the lawyer's keeping.

"To be perfectly frank," Glaxton smiled slightly, "it appears that you drove Simmons away on a mere pretext. Last night you wanted him off the grounds for some purpose—this morning you do not object to his presence. It makes me think of pirates' gold and old romances. If I could only know what you were burying—you and your father! But after it was buried, and your father had left, could you have wanted to dig it up again? Your treatment of Simmons suggests that. These fancies have drifted across my mind, and I think it nothing but frank and fair to tell you so."

"I appreciate your frankness, all the more so as I imagine it's a treat you do not always give your friends. It occurs to me, however, that while you're finding out a good deal about your Cousin John Lyle Warring, he is learning very little about you. Right now, then, is when we break our interview into, that each of us may keep his particular fragment as a pleasant souvenir of memory. To be serious—something hard to maintain with so humorous a companion—I must run for my train."

CHAPTER XVIII

BETTIE AGAIN TO THE RESCUE

In order to catch the early train for Kansas City without making his destination known, John took the local freight to a nearby town and there waited for the cross-country express, headed for St. Louis. At Lexington Junction he left the car at the tank just before the engine pulled up to the station, to board a train traveling in the opposite direction. In due time he was climbing the long flight of iron steps to the waiting-room of the Kansas City Union Station.

After subduing his attire to harmonize with the murky environs of Smiling Lane—accomplished by expert shopping at old-clothes shops—he hastened toward the disreputable quarters of his past adventures, yet not so hurriedly as to neglect to choose alleys and byways safest from his enemies, the guardians of the law.

How remote seemed to him his past, how alien were the surroundings which a month ago had seemed a fitting setting for his life! As on going to Lagville he had been conscious of acting a part, like that of a disguised beggar in scenes of opulence, so now he had the feeling of one of the favored classes passing himself off as a vagrant. In the midst of foul sights and sounds, he found beneath his shabby exterior something of spiritual kinship to the picture on the wall. Without doubt there was this inner resemblance.

Alas! such spiritual texture is invisible to

mortal eyes, incapable of demonstration, and he must continue to lead the hunted existence of a criminal.

Facing Blearstead's Eating House, the Smiling Lane Tenement stood in the shape of a flatiron to fit itself into such space as other tenements had left. It was usually designated as "Old Smiley," but originally it had been dubbed "The Cowcatcher," and to this day each of its inmates, irrespective of age or sex was called a "cow." John by virtue of renting a front corner room on the second floor became one of the herd. Though hoping to finish his business in the city that night, he of course paid a week's rent in advance, and as far as possible confined himself to his squalid apartment lest he encounter an acquaintance in the neighborhood or in the building itself.

Besides the window facing the alley or street that separated Old Smiley's from his uncle's restaurant, another on the side looked out upon a fire-escape, illegally cumbered with various washings and made doubly dangerous in case of fire, by tangled ropes stretched from its railing to upper windows. John's first care was to make sure that this side-window was securely nailed down, then he drew the curtain to the sill, that no one might spy upon him. From the front window he could watch Blearstead's without fear of detection. It was his hope that Blearstead might go away after closing-time, on some nefarious expedition with Cleek, thus leaving an opportunity for a careful search in his quarters for the stolen jewelry. But if Blearstead remained at home that night, John's stay must be protracted, hence a supply of food should be laid in.

It was dusk before he left his room. Not daring to risk recognition in the grocery that

occupied one gloomy corner of the tenement, he made hurried purchases from vendor's push-carts and curbstone markets where the flaring of gasoline torches brought out picturesque costumes and striking colors. He loaded himself with hot tamales whose succulent meaty meal was almost lost in a wilderness of cornshuck, frankfurters of piping hot sauerkraut, dried tongue, shaped like bootheels but flabbier, hard boiled eggs, their whites a pale blue, rolls as hard to crack open as nuts, lettuce, thick brown pies, sweet pickles in tiny wooden boats, cheese not all rind.

All this he stored away in his room, as far as might be from his impossible bed, then took up his post at the front window to watch the eating house. He soon found that a stranger had been employed to wait upon the noisy habits of the place—a girl unknown to him, whose pretty face and slatternly dress showed that she had been better cared for by nature than ever she had cared for herself. He observed familiar figures slouching beneath the window, drifting across to the restaurant, emerging from the swinging doors with jovial or lowering faces, but not once did his uncle show himself. Once his unmistakable shadow fell along the smoke-stained wall of his bedroom, and several times his voice came roaring across the narrow chasm.

At eight o'clock, John ate his solitary supper, his eyes still fixed upon the lights and shadows across the way. Cleek swaggered in to visit his confederate at a later hour, but when he came out alone, John knew his uncle would not leave the house that night. That meant an extra day of waiting, and the young man found what repose he could on a couple of chairs.

The morning broke fair and bright. Familiar sights, which were to him now queerly strange, appeared below; the laundry-wagon rattled up to the threshold and the milk-wagon ground over the cobblestones. Hawkers of fruits and vegetables for a time drowned out the sounds of cursing and crying. Evening came; but Blearstead, as if some intuition had warned him of the watcher, kept close.

Just before sunset a girl stopped before Blearstead's with a basket on her arm. She had fish to sell. John, at the first glimpse of her supple back, knew it was Bettie Hode. He longed intensely for her to turn that he might catch her eye, but during her negotiations with the new waitress she remained in the same position. He felt that he could not let her depart thus. Not only did he feel for her the affection of long years of comradeship, but he ardently desired to compare his old standards with his new. He had once held her above other women—he must see her face again.

When her basket, after very close bargaining, had been emptied, she crossed the street still with head bowed so that he could not catch a glampse of her countenance. John's impatience to see her increased enormously. As noiselessly as possible he darted from his room and sped down the long greasy staircase to the ground-corridor which, without windows, save for a gritty pane in the street-door, separated a rankly perfumed barber-shop from what had been a saloon but was now empty save for a few frank pictures. It was under this saloon that John had hidden in the cellar on the day of his flight from Blearstead's.

Near the corridor's entrance he waited for Bettie's passing, inhaling deeply the cheap perfumes which almost overbore the odor of boiling cabbage. When her shadow fell past the doorway he called cautiously and she, though taken wholly by surprise, came straight to him as if this were a part of her daily program—except for the gladness in her eyes. Their hands clasped firmly, but he lost no time in leading her to his room where the door was instantly bolted, a ceremony to be judged strictly by the code of Smiling Lane.

Safe from prying eyes, he took her hand again—such a hard little hand!—and they looked into each other's eyes with open pleasure.

"I haven't got time to stay with you, John," she sighed regretfully, "for Pa gets worse every day; looks like I can't move without his knowing why. He gives me just so long to sell the fish, and if I ain't back when he thinks I ought to be, there's no use my trying to explain."

"Is he still intimate with Cleek and my uncle?"

"They go out together nearly every night; and when Pa gets back it's morning, and he sleeps half the day. They are taking all kinds of chances; Ma and I are looking for the worst every minute. It can't go on forever. You know how that kind of thing always ends. But there's one good thing about Pa; he was always determined that Ma and I were never to know anything about his doings. If he gets into trouble, he'll not have us suffering for it. Pa ain't all bad." She lifted her head. "I know girls who have lots worse fathers—but I'd better be getting back to mine."

John had been watching her with grave at-

tention. She was young and pretty, she was well-formed. She was honest and faithful and without guile. But there stretched between them an immeasurable gulf. This gulf, a sort of Grand Canyon, had always been there but he had not previously realized its separating force. If he had been in danger of falling over the brink, that was past; he grasped the depths and the distances. He knew she could not see this barrier; and he admitted that to an impartial judge, doubtless a fugitive from justice, and a girl whose father was a suspected but undetected highwayman, would seem in the same class. Perhaps they were. She who had kept herself unspotted was perhaps superior to one whose uncle had induced him to involve himself in a night's lawless adventure.

The principal point for him, driven home by this meeting, was that whatever his past or present might signify, he could not see Bettie with the eyes of a month ago. She was as pretty as he had thought her, and had she been barefooted he would have found her as charmingly picturesque; and her friendliness was exceedingly grateful to his overcharged nerves. But somehow she had been crowded out of the near spaces of his heart. He felt aloof through no fault of hers, and it saddened him to realize that where he saw the yawning canyon her eyes found only a level plain.

While laying in his provisions, he had hoped she might come to the eating house to sell fish, that they might feast together in the snug security of his room. In the old days it would have proved an event of careless gaiety, romantically flavored. What had happened? All his emotions seemed tightened above the

slacked strings of her easy existence, and soul-harmony was out of the question.

He asked if her father had any designs of coming to Lagville to endanger his situation or if she knew anything of his uncle's plans relative to his future, but she shook her head.

"Pa never tells me anything. But sure enough, I've got to go."

He only sighed.

"Say, John, I know something about you that you don't know. Ma told me only the other day. It's awful interesting and strange."

"Let's have it, Bettie."

"No—I won't tell you, since you ask that way," she pouted, opening the door.

He roused himself. "Then I ask you *this* way!" he exclaimed with an uncertain laugh, holding her close.

She remained very still. She whispered, "Want me to stay a little longer with you, John?"

"Of course I do; only, you mustn't get in to trouble with your father."

"The trouble would pass away," she murmured, "and I'd have you to think about. And I'm used to trouble. But anyhow—" she slowly drew away—"it was awful interesting, what Ma told me. How you'd open your eyes if I told!"

He made a gesture as if to grab her again, but she slipped into the hall.

She said, "But you don't really want me to stay. It's just to learn the secret."

"Bettie! You shan't say that."

"No, I won't say it; not again. Honestly, John, if I thought it would make you happier, I'd tell. But Ma says it wouldn't. She said not to let you know, ever or ever. Your

mother told her, years ago. But if the day ever comes when I think it right for you to know, I'm going to tell, anyhow, yes I am!" She asked wistfully, "Are you ever coming back here—I mean, to live?"

"But, Bettie, what could it have been? I must know, really."

He started after her, but she passed lightly to the head of the stairs. "Maybe I'll tell you—oh, certain sure I'll do whatever you want me to do, John—when you come back. To stay—"

Suddenly she raised a warning arm. He understood the signal. The police were at the foot of the stairs. On tiptoe he gained his room, locked the door and braced himself against it.

"Hello, Bettie!" called a policeman whose voice John recognized. "Where's our friend John Walters?"

"I guess he's wherever he went," Bettie replied, showing her teeth in an easy smile. It was difficult to ruffle her hard-tested exterior.

"Oh, I guess not. He was right here. You must have put him in your pocket. Come, come, Bettie, play square. What have you done with him? Tell us where he is."

Bettie answered: "I can tell you what he says about it."

She drew from her bosom the letter John had written her on the eve of his escape from Old Smiley's cellar. John could distinctly hear one of the men reading it aloud to his companions, and as the old phrases came to him, he had the uncanny feeling of listening to the utterance of a dead self.

"Dear Bettie:

"It's like going fishing without bait to leave town without telling you good-by. In the East

I hope to lose myself, big as I am, for I care not for fame. Listen to my advise, my dear: keep out of the newspapers, for there's nothing to it. If I succeed in hiding behind the trees of Manhattan—that's geography for New York City—I'm going to build a little cabin down on Wall Street where the wolves can't get over into my yard. And later, you'll come to me, won't you, Bettie, and be my little wife? When it's muddy, we'll clean our shoes on the skyscrapers and when times are dull we'll get on an Elevated and if the cops come nosing around in their police-boats we'll sink ourselves in a subway and pull under our periscopes. The world is fuller of girls than of boys, but there's only one I ever kissed when we said good-by, and I've set her a chair at the head of my table marked 'Bettie.' If any other lady tries to get into it, she'll get such a hard seat on the floor that she'll see you in the air looking like a big star. This isn't plain talk, but when you're in love, you wear frilled shirts:—

Life will be all joyrides, bright lights and
confetti

When I am plain John Walters and have
my little Bettie."

"That's a love-letter," said one of the men.

Bettie answered pertly, "I took it for such."

"It's a plain offer," said another. "Here's the post mark, 'New York.' He invented this poetry on the train and mailed her after he reached his destination. It's marked March 4th. That shows he must have gone straight there."

"Couldn't hardly get there in that time could he?" the first objected.

"Yes, if he didn't lose any time. That was sure a bad lead to Lagville!"

"Look here," the sergeant suddenly addressed Bettie. "We'll agree that he jumped to New York. But he was seen in town last night. Certain sure. Down on the curb. He's in this house, and you came to meet him. And I believe he's in this room."

He gave John's door a kick that made it jump on its hinges.

"Don't you dare disturb that room," Bettie cried with seeming indignation. She dropped her basket to squeeze herself between them and the portal. "You'll never go in there!"

The murky corridor was filling with curious children. Opened doors let sickly bars of light crisscross on the floor. Opposite Bettie a woman, formless and unconfined, with the lingering beauty of an overblown rose about to drop its petals, stared at the officers with dark hostility. Every face that peered under cobwebbed lintels scowled with hatred. Bettie appealed over the sergeant's shoulder to this woman whom she had never seen before.

"Can he go in there, Mrs. Flannigan?"

"God strike him dead if he does," grated the woman whose name was O'Conner.

Bettie glared at the officer with the expression of a wildcat. "Can't you leave even the dead alone?"

Mrs. O'Conner shouted, taking this hint with swift subtlety, "A poor little mite laid out for her coffin, and the next of kin to her without a cent to pay for the coffin and all! A dead child that never had no chance in this world at all. She was hounded from the cradle and now she can't lay on her deathbed in peace!"

"Oh, the shame of it," shrieked another woman. A wail went up from the cell-like chambers on either side.

Bettie spoke to the men appeasingly. "But you never knew the truth of it, of course. You wouldn't do as Mrs. Flannigan says if you had to cut off your rights hands to keep from doing it. You're real men, I know that much."

The sergeant addressed his men gruffly. "Come along."

"Thank God," cried Mrs. O'Conner hysterically, "there's a worse world than this for them that needs it!"

At the head of the stairs they met a huge unkempt fellow pounding upward.

"Why, hello, Blearstead," the sergeant spoke easily; "coming to call on your nephew?"

Blearstead stopped aghast, then shot a venomous glance at Bettie.

The officer smiled. "Don't blame the girl, she put up a plucky fight to get rid of us. I suppose the rumor that reached us about John Walters must have found its way to you. What do you think? Must be something in it, eh?"

To his men he said, "We'll go back. I don't think it right to leave little girls unattended on their deathbeds. We may have to take up a subscription for that coffin among ourselves." He glanced admiringly at Bettie. "You can go, girl. You've earned it."

But Bettie, white to the lips, stood with hand pressed to her side.

He drew his revolver and covered Blearstead. "But I want you to stay. This is to be a sort of family party." He issued the crisp order to his men: "Break open that door."

CHAPTER XIX

THE JEWELS

Scarcely a word and very few movements in the hall had escaped John's intent ears. He comprehended perfectly what had happened. The evening before, while making his purchases or while carrying them to Old Smiley, he had been seen by friend and foe and variously reported. It crashed upon him as with the falling of a roof upon his head that if he were captured, his life to its very end must prove a pitiful unfulfillment of all he had hoped and his friends had hoped for him.

He rushed to the side-curtain, tore it from its fastenings and strained at the window that looked out upon the fire escape. The nails that held down the sash were bent or broken in the strength of his desperation and he slid down the slender ladder as blows began to rain upon the door of the now deserted room.

To the mouldy bricks of a passageway of a few feet in width he dropped without exciting marked attention, and without tripping over entangling ropes more than twice. Rumors of the police invasion had drawn into the tenement such of the neighborhood as felt curiosity stronger than need of flight. No one lingered before the front door but the ground-corridor was populous with round-eyed children, and dark figures stood expectantly on the staircase.

A splitting sound followed by a heavy jar told that the door had been burst in. In a moment faces would be glaring down into the

triangular court. With amazing speed John flew to his uncle's restaurant; but when the door was reached he sauntered in with the nonchalance of one who has more time at his disposal than he has planned to use.

Several laborers, prevented by the duties of evening shift from watching proceedings across the way, were audibly taking their chile on the high stools before the counter, John fancied he knew one of them and prudently abstained from a closer examination. Pulling his slouch-hat low down over his forehead and jerking up his coat-collar, he ordered "Hamburger," roughly. The peril of his situation did not produce the quiver of a muscle. Alert and keen of brain he noted the changes that had taken place during his absence, caught the fact that the workmen whose backs were toward his little table were oblivious of his presence in their eager discussion about affairs at Washington, and through an upper pane of a street-window observed a policeman looking from his rented room.

The strange waitress came for his order and vanished behind the curtain guarding the gasoline stove whence immediately issued the hissing of meat on greasy hot iron. Silently he slid from behind the table and vanished through the door of the room in which he had once passed the night concealed in the laundry-basket.

Everything looked much the same, and in his secret place in the wall he found undisturbed the private keys of which his uncle knew nothing. He was sure this was his only chance of escape but he moved as collectedly as if one chance were all anybody could reasonably require, taking comfort in the fact

that this narrow chamber with its skylight had no outside door.

The keys secured, he glided to the stairway, gained the upper hall and reached his uncle's door. One of the keys fitted the lock perfectly. In a moment he was in the bedroom with the door locked behind him, the key remaining in the lock. He stood under an uneven ceiling which in one place came down to within a yard of the footboard. An oldfashioned folding-bed stood against the wall at the only place high enough to receive it. There was very little furniture. In the shabby rugs little brown holes recorded hours spent with an unsteady pipe.

Here he believed he would be safe until his uncle came. He might not be allowed to come, yet there was little hope that the police would feel justified in his retention. How he might take the invasion of his private quarters must be left to chance. Furious he would be, certainly, and alarmed on finding that John could enter at will; but there was a possibility—not very strong—that he might fail to divine the other's real motive.

In the past, the duplicate key had unlocked for John many of his uncle's secrets, hence he was not obliged to lose any time seeking hiding-places. He knew them all and in the first explored—a hollow under the floor, exposed by drawing back a rug and lifting a loose plank—he found the Warring jewels: the pearl necklace, the platinum rings with their diamonds—everything. In the rush of his delight, astonishment over the quick success vanished as soon as it came; it was as if he had always known he would find them there.

Spreading his handkerchief out upon the floor, one secured at the old-clothes shop for

the purpose, he heaped thereon the jems to make them up in a safe packet. There was not very much light in the room; there never was; but a warm glow bathed his hands as he slipped the precious stones between his fingers. From below came faint sounds from the dining-room, but about him it was very still. He could hear himself breathing. Street sounds were no noisier than usual. The room was at the back of the house and the single window looked out upon roofs and chimneys, hence he could not know what was taking place in Old Smiley.

Surely Bettie would not come to grief for her part in the comedy. Plucky little girl! What a pity her advantages had not been better. As brave as the bravest, as true as steel, if she were, for instance, like Lucia—but there was only one Lucia. He seemed to see Lucia in the flashing of the jewels. This necklace had lain round her neck on the night of the reception in his honor. If those who had warmly greeted him on that occasion, while his “father” looked on so proudly, could see him now!—

Suddenly he looked over his shoulder to find Blearstead standing in the room regarding him under beetling brows, his nose and mouth writhing horribly. He was in his stockinged feet and could have come only through the little door behind the folding-bed, a door John had never known to be used, and had supposed fastened up. Without doubt the other had discovered the key in the hall door and without attempting to force it open had shown the advantage of his secret means of entrance.

John dropped the handkerchief and the jewels were scattered over the floor.

Blearstead glared at him with the silent ferocity of a wild beast about to spring.

John snatched up by its handle a defensive object which he had taken from a shelf before drawing up the loosened floor-planks; it was a notary seal weighing about six pounds. He leaped to his feet whirling the instrument in a wide circle about his head. "Stay where you are," he warned him, "or I'll brain you."

"Put that thing down!" Blearstead's voice was a quivering snarl. Rage tore at his vitals like a physical agony. He was sane enough to realize that whatever passed in the room must be kept to a subdued key but within the limits of this instinctive caution he was a raging tempest and for the moment the violence of his emotions filled the boundaries of consciousness. Almost at once, however, there became room for comprehension of the young man's mood.

His nephew was not, like himself, storm-tossed; all the same, there was death in his calm depths. "If you come one step nearer," came the voice that no longer sounded young, "I will smash in your skull."

Blearstead's great breast rose and fell rapidly.

John went on, his voice without inflexion, his mouth and chin like graven marble, "We'd better understand each other. I'd rather die than spend my years in the penitentiary; but I'd rather pass my life in the penitentiary than ever come under your power again. Put up your hands. Turn with your face to the folding-bed. And stand perfectly still while I search you. Uncle though you are, I'll kill you if you wait until I count four. One—two—"

Blearstead's fury was less than his terror

of the fixed eyes. He turned cumbrously and stood as directed while his pockets were emptied. John examined the revolver thus secured, found it loaded, and retreated with it to the gaping hole in the floor.

"You may turn now. Sit down on this chair." John shoved a chair up to the bed then went back, knelt, spread out his handkerchief and began reassembling the Warring treasures. As he worked, always with the weapon within reach of his hand, he talked steadily while Blearstead scowled from his wooden chair.

"I'm taking back to their owners the things you stole. You think I want them for myself, but that's because you never understood me and my mother and never wanted to understand us. By sheer brute strength you were able to keep me down. Well, I haven't the brute strength to overcome you, but I have something better—this gun and the resolution to use it if necessary though the sound of it should bring all the police down upon me. Of course in times past I could have drawn a gun on you time and again, but a man's a fool to pull a gun unless ready to go to the limit. I never felt that I could kill you till now. I've been weak. That's what got me into the trouble on Troost Avenue and that's what put me in my false position in Lagville. But I'm not weak now. I don't think I am. You can try me if you want to. But there's no use thinking I'm the same John Walters who left this joint last month. I've had the breath of the life that counts blowing in my face and I'll never suffocate again in your narrow circle of living."

Blearstead muttered, "He's crazy." He sought to compose his face in more agreeable.

lines. "If you had your senses, nevvv, you'd die of shame at being that ungrateful. What I've done for you only the angels could keep count of. Nursed you and fed you and clothed you and put money in your pocket. And your ma, too. The only hope I got is that you're crazy and don't know what you're doing. I took in you and poor sister Anne Walters when nobody cared if you was starving—you with your broken leg twice broke. You wasn't so particular about my 'narrow circle of living' then. You was glad to get in the center of it to keep warm. You're awful moral, you are, threatening to murder your own uncle in cold blood, passing yourself off as a millionaire's son and stealing the loot from him that had the trouble of getting it. You must have got religion over yonder! But you're crazy, that's the straight of it. Poor John! I could cry! And all the cops in Kansas City after you! They ought to have you in the moving pictures. But I won't say any more. You're just naturally and constitutionally crazy and can't help it."

John carefully tied together the corners of the handkerchief. "My mother taught me such contempt for thieves that I've always been ashamed to call you uncle. If you hadn't hunted her up and fastened yourself upon us, I believe she'd be alive today. We didn't want you to meddle in our affairs. It's true we were poor. She spent all she could make to give me the best education she could pay for, but we were happy—till you found us. It's true that when I had my fall you helped me. Well, I paid for everything by hard work in the dining-room, and by going with you and Cleek on that Troost Avenue job. As for pretending to be John Lyle Warring, it was only to get

my breath; I haven't done any harm and I shall leave there in a few days, taking nothing with me."

Blearstead cried out in dismay.

"And you are to leave me alone," John added threateningly. "You are not to come there again. If you do, I'll expose you and Cleek if I die for it."

Blearstead grew purple. "So you'll turn State's evidence, you cursed traitor."

"No—because you'll not visit Lagville again."

Blearstead started up with an oath. "You say you'll expose me and Cleek if you die for it. I say, you'd better die first!"

John grabbed the revolver and stood upright. "I realize what it would mean for a shot to be heard, but that wouldn't prevent me. You never knew any one more determined, for there's only one course of action open to me and I shall take it. I hope you won't get in the way."

Blearstead tried to out-stare him, then surlily dropped his eyes.

"Remember if you set foot in Lagville, I shall give you up. I don't know all your crimes but I know enough." He moved to the door. "If you try to stop me after this door is closed, I'll call for help, turn the valuables over to the police and end it. Sit down in that chair. I advise you to stay in it till I'm out of the neighborhood so you won't be tempted to get yourself into trouble. You see I'm not ungrateful; I'm thinking of your own good; and it's not for your good to try to get between me and liberty."

John concealed the precious packet under his coat and left the room.

No sound came from Blearstead.

A back stairway, the steps worn to concave shallows by the stealthy feet of criminals, led to a cellar which by an underground passage brought John to another cellar beyond the passageway. Half an hour later he was riding on a streetcar in a crowded section of the city. Downtown he took an interurban car that carried him away through country fields and little towns to a famous health resort where he spent the night, and effected a change of clothes. The next morning he went by motorcar to an inland village whence the train brought him back to Lagville.

It was the same train that had first brought him to the river-town and he felt sure his coming would prove as unexpected as on that historic occasion. He was therefore bewildered to discover the Warring automobile drawn up at the edge of the platform as if to do him honor. In the front seat were Mrs. Abbottsfield and her daughter. His first moment of stupefaction over the thought that they had in some mysterious manner learned of his movements, gave way to the reasonable inference that they had come to meet somebody else.

Virgie, at the wheel, gave him a startled glance and her face perceptibly darkened, causing him to remember what had all this while been forgotten, the strange glances she had given him the night of the robbery. He recalled her alleged "headache" of the following morning and his suspicion that it had been invented to save her from facing him by daylight. All this now seemed suddenly important, but his manner did not betray uneasiness. He greeted Mrs. Abbottsfield with the gravity she liked, then hailed Virgie as if there were no cloud between them.

Finding her response constrained, he determined to go to her at once for an explanation of the mystery. However, before he could carry out this swiftly and, under the circumstances, recklessly formed plan, a hand grasped his arm.

Lucia's joyful surprise, openly, even proudly expressed, was so delightful—the densely packed Sunday-afternoon crowd of sight-seers had before shut her off from his view—that Virgie faded in its radiance to a negligible shadow.

“How perfectly splendid!” Lucia excitedly squeezed his arm. “But don't be puffed up with the idea that we came to meet you.” Then he discovered behind her a young woman who had evidently come on the same train. There was something oddly familiar about her thoughtful gray eyes.

Lucia cried gaily, “Alice—”

But the introduction was never finished. The gray eyes widened, the little mouth opened swiftly and as swiftly closed, while the trim figure shook as from contact with a powerful battery.

Lucia interrupted herself. “I do believe you two have already met!”

“Of course we have!” John said with brilliant hardness. His reckless air was that of a man falling over a precipice who, in falling, desires to leave behind him the memory of a pleasant smile. “Of course we have met. This is Miss Alice Klade. How nice, seeing you again like this! Do you know, it was my understanding that you were not coming for a week!”

Alice Klade did not return his bow.

Lucia, supposing her friend too astonished at the unexpected meeting to make suitable response, said playfully as she patted John's arm, "Oh, Alice! To think of your knowing my brother! You must be very nice to him."

CHAPTER XX

THE POLITE BURGLAR

"Your brother!" Alice ejaculated, starting back with increased pallor and staring at John with eyes wider than before. "What do you mean?"

Lucia, bewildered by the agitation of her intimate friend with all of whose looks and intonations she had supposed herself thoroughly familiar, appealed to John. "But where could you have known Alice?"

"You can't wonder that she didn't know me to be your brother," he returned, "when I wasn't aware of it myself. Not at that time, you understand. For it was before I discovered Lagville. I remember perfectly. But really I can't tell where we were." He felt convinced that the last beams of life's sunshine were fading from his vision, but he bravely maintained his self-control. "Where was it, Miss Klade?"

He left it for her to explain that on the only occasion of their encounter she had been in bed.

The guest closed her eyes as if the light had suddenly grown too strong for them, but no words escaped the straight lines of her lips.

They were pushed toward the car by the slowly moving crowd. Lucia was still too deeply pleased over the return of her "brother" to be acutely aware of what was going on around her; but Virgie and her mother were watching the scene, the girl with brooding

glances, the other with keen eyes which nothing escaped.

John smiled brightly at Lucia. "I can't get over the impression that your friend was not coming until next week!"

"She wasn't. But when I wrote about father's being away, she hurried up her visit. And now, you know, since the event she was expecting to help me get ready for is not going to happen—" she laughed a little nervously, but did not blush at this vague reference to the broken engagement.

John bestowed his hard, fixed smile upon Alice Klade. There was no use to climb into the automobile only to be driven out the next moment by exposure. "How delightful for you to be with Lucia while her father's away," he murmured, gathering strength for the attack. "A pleasure not expected so soon—"

Again Alice Klade's mouth moved without producing any sound. She was a reserved girl, averse to display of emotion, one who preferred quietly to give way before the noisy forces of daily life rather than battle for her opinions or struggle to vantage ground by self-assertion. Lucia, a brisker and more resolute character, respected her taste for quiet and subdued tones in colors, voice-melody, thought and action. But while she was content for Alice to efface herself for the sake of peace, she had no intention of imitating her example. As a result, Lucia was accustomed to take the lead and was surprised and at times discomfited when on rare occasions her friend raised her head with independent opinions of her own.

"You are tired out with your trip," Lucia said sympathetically, slipping her arm about Alice's waist. As usual, she took for granted that she knew what the other was feeling and

thinking and what was best for her as well. "I must get you out of this glaring sun. Why do we stand here anyway? What are you waiting for?" Then she called vivaciously to Virgie, "What do you think? These two already know each other!"

"So I observed," Virgie answered gravely, her hands grasping the steering-wheel with whitened knuckles. John had never thought her nose so long. He wondered her mother did not complain of it.

When the automobile glided from the platform, John was in the tonneau between Lucia and Alice Klade. The latter sat removed as far from him as the side of the car would permit, but Lucia, holding his hand, left no space between them.

"How fine you are looking!" Lucia cried, gazing up into his face with affectionate admiration, and, as usual, not expecting Alice to say anything. "I don't know how we lived without you! You mustn't ever go away again."

Her words were such as Bettie might have uttered, and the fondness of her eyes was no deeper than Bettie's. Yet the manner of her speech and the expression of what she felt was that of another world and John, recalling his experiences of the past three days, felt that he had brought an unwholesome atmosphere into the simple village life.

Lucia went on gaily, "I can't wait until we get home to find out how and when and where you and Alice became friends. What one of you has forgotten surely the other can supply. Oh, Alice! When I used to talk about my darling brother having been kidnapped, wasn't it strange it didn't occur to you that the John Lyle Warring you knew was *my* John Lyle

Warring! Because, it's such an unusual name; with such an unusual history!"

"As to that," John ventured, observing that Alice made no sign of speech, "it just comes to me—yes, it's getting quite clear, everything is—you can't blame Miss Klade—"

"But you must call her Alice," Lucia protested. "She is my Alice, and she must be your Alice."

"Certainly."

Lucia gave Alice a hug and added teasingly, "And you mustn't judge her by her silence; she is always quiet."

"I was about to say that when we met, Alice didn't learn my name."

Mrs. Abbottsfield, looking over the back of the front seat echoed, "Didn't learn your name! How—how unconventional!"

"It was, rather," John admitted, "but it was a chance meeting, entirely unexpected on both sides. Oh, yes, it was altogether accidental." He bent forward seeking to catch Alice's expression, but she only tried to withdraw farther; without success. Was she determined to betray him then and there, or would it better suit her abhorrence of public scenes to wait for the seclusion of her friend's private room?

Alice at last spoke. It could hardly be further delayed. But she spoke without having formed any definite plan. "I never knew—oh, not once did it occur to me that—that he was your *brother*!"

These words told John that Alice did not question the relationship but was appalled by its implications.

"Of course I understand that, honey; but where could it have been?"

The last place, Alice imagined, that Lucia could have guessed. She did not know what

to say. How could she tell Lucia that her brother was a housebreaker? Yet if this dreadful fact were not revealed, a plausible tale must supply the blank. Alice had not decided to hide anything, and even if she wished to do so she knew herself to be too profoundly distressed for creative work.

She began slowly, "It was in Kan—"

Lucia began speaking at the same time, consequently drowning out the less-assured voice: "Of course we know it couldn't have been in Kansas City for John says he was never there in his life."

Alice paused with open mouth.

Mrs. Abbottsfield, leaning over her seat, exclaimed, "But Alice was going to say Kansas City!"

"Oh, no," interposed John, resenting the elderly lady's air of trying to catch him in an error. Her expression of malicious satisfaction—such, at least, it appeared to him, though doubtless he misjudged her—had the effect of putting him wholly at his ease. "Not Kansas City," he continued, "but Canada. Yes, how it all comes to me!" He looked at Lucia. "This is the romance, the story: It is evening. And rather late at that. After dark. But of course it grows darker there earlier than in this latitude."

Lucia was surprised and looked blankly at her friend. "Alice! I never knew you'd been to Canada. And I thought you'd told me of all your travels!"

Alice said faintly, "Our train ran through a corner of Canada in running from New York to Chicago." She now gazed at John. Her eyes were fascinated.

He caught his breath in quick relief. Would she follow his lead, after all?

Alice spoke as under a hypnotic spell. "For one thing, I remember there's a little Canadian town just across the river from Detroit called Windsor."

John exclaimed eagerly, "Will I ever forget that little town! Wasn't you hungry, though! But of course all of us were nearly starved."

She looked at him, saying nothing. In spite of her sinister knowledge she found him infinitely less terrible than she could have deemed possible.

He explained to Lucia, "You see the snows get awfully deep in Canada. Cold country, that is. When the trains get stalled in the drifts, sometimes it's a matter of days before they can be dug out." He looked at Alice. "Did you ever see anything like it?"

"I never did," she admitted. She felt herself borne beyond the borderline of abstract morality into a practical country exceedingly full of interest.

"But I made a tunnel to a little restaurant and came back with something to eat; some beef and plum pudding and a jar of tea—the Canadians are great on such things. English, you know."

"You saved me," Alice murmured. "When I first saw you, I thought I was going to die. I thought I should surely die! It was—"

"And you gave me a book as a souvenir. Do you remember that book of poems? I know some of it by heart. There was one poem named, 'Give a Fellow a Chance.' Do you remember that?"

She shook her head, still spell-bound.

"It goes like this:

'When you meet a man that's trying hard,
so hard, to make good,

No matter what the cloud may have been
That you've found him in—
'been' and 'in' are the only rhymes in the thing
except those coming now—look close for 'em
—you see, Lucia, this is Free Verse—hold
tight:

“No matter what the circumstance,
Oh, give him a chance.”

“I don't remember any such poem,” Alice remarked, gradually finding herself, “but I approve of the sentiment. I'm glad you liked the book. It was one of my favorites. I used to read it just before I went to sleep, but that night I'd left it on the table.”

Lucia burst out laughing. “But, honey! You hadn't gone to bed.”

Alice caught her breath and John looked at her reproachfully. “You'd better let me tell this,” he remarked gravely. “Yes, Lucia, of course she had. I'm afraid I haven't made the scene plain to you. She was in her berth, naturally too hungry to care for poetry. What she needed was solid victuals; and when I appeared before her with the beef and all—well, naturally there was nothing conventional about our meeting.”

Mrs. Abbottsfield offered an objection: “Alice, I thought you took that trip to New York in May.”

“It was a late snow,” John explained. “You can always count on a late snow up north. Why don't you ask what luck I had with my detective?”

“I have that in the back of my mind,” Lucia declared, “but you are so much more interesting than all the diamonds in the world—”

“Help, help!” John appealed to the heavens. His spirits were enormously restored. “Vir-

gie," he called, "turn and give me a look; I need a tonic."

But Virgie did not turn her exceedingly stiff neck.

Lucia laughed at Alice as she patted his shoulder. "Honey, he isn't used to being loved. He doesn't know yet how to take it! But why did you never tell me about this Canadian romance? It makes me jealous!" And she scowled delightfully.

"I say," John cried, drawing away from Lucia and feeling a delightful warmth that he had no right to feel, "this won't do. I must give you something to keep your hands full." Drawing forth his packet, he poured the gems into her lap. "Every one's there, I hope. Count and see."

Lucia gave a little cry of delight and Alice one of admiration, but still Virgie did not turn her head though its stiffness showed that she was aware of what was going on in the tonneau.

The car stopped before the Warring residence and John sighed, "Home again!" His smile faded as he speculated on how long Alice would keep the secret and how soon it might be before Blearstead made another attempt upon the house.

CHAPTER XXI

LUCIA ON THE RIVER-BLUFF

As soon as Alice Klade had been installed in her room, Lucia, without waiting for the excitement over the restored jewelry to subside, called John to the automobile which had been left before the gate. "Come with me," she said with her usual breathless excitement when embarking upon a new adventure. "I've found the most wonderful spot for watching the sun set, and while we're waiting there, you must tell all about your trip, and how your detective traced down the rings and necklace."

He was glad to escape from the house, for Mrs. Abbottsfield's reserve, Virgie's aloofness and Alice's inscrutable gray eyes suggested all sorts of unpleasant possibilities. With Lucia he could put behind him the past and ignore the future. He took the wheel, and she in the front seat at his side, directed their course. The road took them abruptly away from the village into the open country with the sun at their back.

"Spring's here," she said, looking into his face with shining eyes, "unmistakably and whole-heartedly here; and Cousin Claxton is gone."

"Gone!" he echoed, the name of the lawyer doing something to temper the beating of his heart under her adorable eyes of blue. "That makes it full summer, doesn't it?" he added lightly. "What do you mean by 'gone'?"

"All we know is that he has gone away,"

she said gaily, "and all we care is that he's gone away!"

"Left Simmons?"

"No, I think you must have intimidated him, somehow. I'm expecting a letter directing us to forward their trunks! You stood up to Cousin Claxton, and he never had any one to stand up to him before."

John tried desperately to recall his "standing up" during his only interview with the lawyer, but could not read intimidation on the dark face of his enemy. He shook his head. "I'm afraid you flatter me."

"Perhaps I do, you wonderful boy; but how can I help it?—I'm so immensely proud of you."

"Proud!" he deprecated her enthusiasm while it stirred his blood.

"Yes, proud of you every way; your bearing, your beautiful eyes—"

"Lucia, you'd better not say these things to me. Every one knows his own disposition better than others can know it. I know it isn't good for mine to be told such things."

"Then I'll say I'm proud of your quickness in picking up the little manners and habits that matter, and dropping those that don't. I don't believe there's one in a thousand that could have changed as you have in the past few weeks."

"I had you to change for. That's what did it."

"And I'm thinking of what you'll be in the years to come. And you're so easy about everything. You carry yourself as if you didn't matter to yourself at all, but must matter to everybody else. You're always ready. You can't think how I value that as a gift—always being ready. Ready for anything. And then

your looks. There's no one within miles and miles— Yes, I am proud of you, and I'll not be intimidated into keeping still about it."

"Of course I know you're my friend," he murmured, letting himself bask.

"Your friend!" She repudiated the term with warmth that made his blood tingle. "You know I love you as I've never loved any one." She broke off to laugh at her own passionate insistence, then said lightly, "And I think it only fair that you should say something nice to me occasionally." She added with a teasing smile, "Which you never do."

"There's something to be said, I own," he responded with careful slowness, "and some day it may be counted to me for righteousness that I didn't say it." He gave a short laugh. "You see, I'm not used to being a brother. I'd be sure to say something awkward. But you're all right, Lucia."

"Do you mean *quite* all right?"

"Just like that."

"That's another thing I adore in you," she declared smiling. "You're so shy! If you like what I'm wearing or how I arrange my hair, it couldn't be awkward once in a while to say so—or just that you are pleased that I am pleased with you."

"All right. I must remember that."

"It isn't something for you to remember, but to begin on right now." She interrupted herself to order the car stopped. They were at the margin of the woods and it was necessary to walk the rest of the way along a seldom-used path that led through dense undergrowth and over wild grasses. As they followed the trail arm-in-arm, she persisted:

"You must 'remember that,' you say. Why not tie a string around your finger to suggest

saying, 'Lucia, your dress is becoming!' Now John, confess: didn't you take a romantic interest in Alice when feeding her in her berth like a bird in its nest? Beware, my brother! She and the Rev. Harry Tredmill are engaged, and you have claimed Brother Tredmill as your friend."

He laughed. "Upon my word, though I've often thought of your friend as the night-girl who woke up to find me hovering near, the memory has never been touched by sentiment."

Then he uttered a cry of delight. The last rampart of pawpaw bushes passed, they found themselves on a triangular space that jutted out boldly into the sky while the river, some two hundred feet below, swept in a majestic curve between high banks of vivid green.

"I knew you'd like it," she declared, happy in his enthusiasm. On the extreme corner of the bluff rested a huge flat rock. "We'll perch ourselves up there," she said, "and as much of the world as we can see will belong to just you and me. I've climbed up there when I was all by myself, but—well, of course I oughtn't to mind *you*, but you haven't been a member of the family so very long. I must call for help."

He put his hand under her elbow. "Seems awfully high, all of a sudden," she murmured. "You ridiculous boy, of course you've got to take me in your arms and just set me up there. Oh, oh, I wish you could see yourself blushing. Come on and do it."

As he lifted her from the ground, such a wave of supreme gladness swept over him, he stood very still as if to preserve his footing against the sea threatening to overwhelm him. Lucia expected every instant to be seated upon the rock, but made no movement of im-

patience. "How strong you are!" she murmured, nestling close.

He had never before held his arms about her, he never expected to hold them about her again. He loved her with all his virile strength, and she, not understanding herself, was hungering for his love. So for a few moments he remained very still while the level rays of the sun turned the surface of the gray rock to a shield of beaten gold. It rushed over him that it was best to tell her all. The thought, which hovered on the limits of resolve, shook him physically so that she felt his tremor. What would she say when he exclaimed, "Lucia, I am not your brother. I am only—your lover!"

Ah, but he was more than that; not only her lover but an imposter, a supplanter, a pretender, a fugitive from justice!

She sighed with profound content, "You are glad to have your little sister!"

He placed her upon the rock, then climbed beside her. They were caught in the flood of light that was passing from the twilight world into the glowing sky. He turned his back to the river, still tense with the heart-cry he had almost uttered, still shaken from the escape of not having uttered it. There had fallen between their usual selves one of those brief rare interruptions that cut across ordinary happenings and modes of thought giving a fleeting glimpse of the rich warm blood that throbs beneath life's casual surface. Its symbol he found in the splendor on her face, the glory of her hair. Such an experience, coming unaware, opens up amazing vistas of joy which, before they can be defined, fade out, leaving no jewel of all the riches showered in one's lap except the pearl of memory.

To Lucia, it was no descent from the heights of the sublime to demand an account of John's recent adventures. He was to her a thousand times more interesting than the river and the distant hills, and all he could say would seem in harmony with their May-time loveliness.

But with his first words—"I started for St. Louis—" John felt that he had dropped in an elevator to the basement of a skyscraper.

"That was your home after you ran away from New Orleans," she commented. "I suppose your detective-friend lives there."

"As soon as I described the robbery, he knew who had done it," John went on, sketchily. "It happened to be somebody I know—I've been thrown with all sorts of crooks, Lucia. It wouldn't do for him to see me, or he'd recognize me and skip out with the jewels. So I rented a room in a hard part of the city, and stocked up with food as if in a state of siege. At last my man came with the jewelry and here I am. Not much of a story, you see."

"Not much, as you tell it," she smiled archly. "But why have you left out all about Bettie?"

He gasped and turned pale. "Bettie?" he faltered, marvelling how she could possibly have known anything about his trip. Then he tried to laugh.

"It's no use, John," she said grimly. "I'll admit I made a guess in the dark. You have spoken of Bettie as a river-girl; and St. Louis is a river-town. And your guilty look was as good as plain admission. You saw your friend Bettie!"

"Well, yes, certainly—" his attempt to speak indifferently only ended by giving a touch of

stiffness to his manner. "I saw several of my old friends."

"Never mind about the others. Tell me about Bettie. Was she barefooted on the river-beach? Was she as pretty as ever?" She was leaning forward to look into his eyes, and he was affecting a laugh too precise for harmony.

He turned at bay. "She wasn't a tenth as pretty as you were when you were barefooted the night of the robbery."

Lucia shrugged with absolute indifference about her own appearance. "But I don't count. My barefootedness is all in the family. If I were as ugly as could be, you'd be bound to love me just the same. Do tell me about Bettie." In her teasing laughter he found something hard and sharp, very discomfiting.

"I've nothing to tell. Except that she's a mighty plucky girl; and as true a friend as a fellow could have."

"Did you kiss her, John?—when you said good-by?" She was still smiling with that unsympathetic hard brightness in the blue of her eyes. "Or ever?"

He felt that she was pressing an unfair advantage and his mouth began to show grim lines. "Yes," he said.

Despite her air of raillery she had been serious. "Oh, John!" reproach rang in her tones. "How could you!"

"You don't understand. It isn't as if some one should kiss you. It forms no epoch in Bettie's life when she is kissed. It isn't anything except—'Hello!'"

Tears showed in the blue and Lucia winked hard to keep them back. "Then—if it didn't mean anything, why did you? And how could you want to?"

"You're not dealing fair with me, Lucia. You've led me along with a smile that didn't mean anything, and now you pounce upon me just because I'm in a corner."

"If it comes to a question of fairness—" Lucia tilted up her chin—"I don't think you were fair to poor Bettie, if you didn't mean anything; or fair to yourself."

"I don't mind cheating myself occasionally. Of course you have been kissed by Eugene Ware; but now that the engagement's broken it proves that *that* didn't mean anything either. And while we're still on the question of fairness," he added illogically, "that doesn't seem fair to *me*."

"To you?" she opened her eyes very wide.

"Yes," he returned with dignity; "to me, as your brother."

She shrugged and said dryly, "I think we'd better go home. Alice will be wondering what has become of us. And it will be getting dark. Anyway—" she waved impatiently at the river-view—"all that is spoiled."

"Very well," he agreed with equal dryness. He jumped from the rock with as much gravity as the scramble permitted and waited for her; but as he upheld his arms, all clouds vanished. That there had been clouds, made her hands upon his shoulders inexpressibly dear. And when she whispered, "Did we almost quarrel?" he denied it stoutly.

"Here's a bargain," she breathed rapidly when he had placed her upon the ground. "You shall kiss away Eugene Ware. And when you have—" she held up her adorable mouth to him while the smiles chased each other across her dimpling face, "I'll kiss away Bettie from your lips forever and ever."

With thought suspended, he bent toward her

radiant loveliness like a tree bowed in a strong wind which though stout of heart and fibre cannot but yield to the breath of nature's passion. But with the fragrant breath of Lucia touching his cheek he became less tree than man and caught himself and did what he could to cover his retreat by patting her face gently.

"We'll take all that for granted," he said, and turned brusquely to lead the way back through the woods.

"I do believe you're angry still!" she complained plaintively.

"Angry? I? With *you*? If you knew my feelings, my dear, you'd find them—well, quite the reverse of angry." But he kept in the lead to the automobile.

"Sometimes you puzzle me," Lucia sighed as they entered the yard, after leaving the car in the Warring garage. "For a boy so full of life, you seem at times remarkably unresponsive. Sometimes almost—almost insensible."

"Yes," he responded vaguely, "at times I'm like that. I believe I'll not go into the house just yet. Don't wait for me. I'll stroll about the garden—and try to find myself."

She suggested eagerly, "Maybe it would help you to find yourself if I went with you."

"It wouldn't." His decision was prompt. "I seem less myself when I'm with you."

She darted away, but stopped abruptly at the top of the porch steps to look down upon him as he paused in the path. Out of the dusk her hair burned with living light and the whiteness of her skin quivered against the darkened interior of the hall like the beckoning of a will-o'-the-wisp to fairyland. "John: really and truly—you don't care for that Bettie-girl?"

"Not in the way you mean."

"Then it isn't about her that you want to go strolling and meditating in the garden?"

He could not keep back a smile. "It is otherwise," he confessed. Then earnestly, "But I want you to think well of her; she's an awfully fine girl."

"I'll think well of her if you don't think too much of her yourself. I shall never think well of anybody who takes you away from me, John. It seems dreadful to say it, but I know it's true. I'm never going to marry, and I want to keep you with me, always."

"I shall stay with you just as long as you'll let me. Run upstairs and look after Alice. We ought to be happy while Glaxton is away. You are happy aren't you, Lucia?" he added wistfully.

She answered a little uncertainly, "I ought to be. As you suggest, all the conditions are favorable for happiness. But I don't know. I feel queer, somehow; and old. As if I'd lost something out of life, something important, and can't find it, and don't even know what it is. Did you ever feel old, John? It's like a cold wind blowing on you."

She laughed out. "But what nonsense I'm talking!" She waved her hand and danced through the doorway, but when he was lost from sight, slipped into a room to be alone. Alice felt at home; she could look out for herself.

John plunged into the garden, grimly resolved upon leaving to Alice Klade a free field. Now if ever, he supposed, she would tell Lucia the truth about the Troost Avenue episode. In his state of harried suspense he sought diversion by examining the spot where he had buried the box of banknotes. Apparently it

had not been visited since its concealment in the shrubbery. Diverting his way to the main path he reached the summerhouse before aware of subdued voices issuing from its obscurity.

He peered in and there were dismayed gasps from two figures seated on the rustic bench. "Virgie and Alice!" he exclaimed, gazing intently through the gloom, and subtly aware of their embarrassment. "May I come in?"

There was no response.

"I'm quite sure I can give the countersign," he went on recklessly; it's *John Lyle Warring*. Yes, I am the subject of your confidences." He stepped over the threshold with a laugh that sounded gay.

"I happen to be pretty well informed on that theme myself," he continued. "Permit me to place all the facts at your disposal."

CHAPTER XXII

SECRETS

Virgie Abbottsfield and Alice Klade were standing at one of the upper windows when Lucia and John went away in the automobile to the river bluff. Alice murmured, "How proud she is of her brother!"

Virgie responded restrainedly, "Yes, she is devoted to him."

Alice longed to be alone that she might adjust her mind to the amazing discovery that the recovered brother was her Polite Burglar, but Mrs. Abbottsfield would not let her off from extensive inquiries about the best families of Kansas City. Apparently unaware of the volcano smouldering under their feet, Mrs. Abbottsfield preserved her unimpeachable air of gentility while asking about people whose only claim to her interest was that they knew what's what and, according to the daily press, functioned fashionably.

Virgie slipped away. Being Mrs. Abbottsfield's daughter, she could do that. Alice, held in the toils, became so dry that her monosyllabic fillers rattled in her throat.

The telephone rescued her. The Rev. Harry Tredmill was asking for her first evening in Lagville. She promised it eagerly hoping from him to get some light on what should be done, then fled to the garden.

"I was hoping you would come," Virgie greeted her from the summerhouse, "for I've something important to say to you."

Alice slowly took her place beside the shad-

owy figure. There had never been any intimacy between these two but they felt nothing against each other; theirs was that neutral state of mind wherein increased frankness is easier attained than in passionate friendship colored by preconceived partialities.

Alice confided gravely, "And I, too, have something important on my mind." Suddenly she was glad not to be left alone to think it out. At the same time she was dimly aware of an unreasonable satisfaction in Virgie's homeliness. Some ugly girls are at times, thanks to the adventitious aid of pretty gowns or altered coiffures, almost not ugly, just as a pretty girl like Alice may appear disconcertingly plain. Such manifestations leave one's mind unprepared for the future. But Virgie was always ugly, no matter what she did about it or did not do, and Alice, in the midst of her perplexity found in this triumphant quality a heartening permanency that promised help.

For a time neither spoke. It was hard to put into words the thoughts crouching timid and afraid in their brains. Alice tried to get further into the matter by making the same start that she had tried without success: "How proud Lucia is of her brother!"

Virgie with her "perfectly devoted!" refused to carry her a step into the mystery.

"Of course," Alice spoke casually, "Lucia wrote me all about her brother's being found. Did you see the baby-things he brought to prove his identity?"

"Oh, yes, and the letters. He had the letters his father wrote the awful creature that kidnapped him."

"Yes, Lucia said so."

Virgie spoke with an air of finality. "Those

things can't be denied. But they don't mean so much to me. It's his tone of voice and his movements. He speaks and moves just as his father does."

"Did he from the first? That might come from association."

"But, anyway, his face shows the relationship."

"That's what Lucia said. She wrote that he's the very image of the picture on the wall in the reception-hall. No, in the front parlor, it was. Maybe so. I haven't examined the picture lately. But I must confess I don't see any of the Warring traits in—in this one."

"The resemblance grows upon one," Virgie remarked. "He looks more like that picture than I thought he did."

"Oh, I understand that there's no question of the kinship." Then she deflected: "You had something to tell me?"

"Yes; and you, to tell me."

Alice temporized. "Ye-es. But what I have to tell is so big—so awful, in a way, though on getting closer to it this afternoon it has seemed to thin down somewhat . . . But I hardly know whether to explain or not. You see, I'm so perfectly devoted to Lucia. . . I wouldn't do anything in the world to make her miserable—" She stopped.

"I may as well tell you," Virgie offered, "that I noticed something strange in the way you greeted John at the station, so I know that what is on your mind is all about him."

Silence.

"Lucia is my friend, too, an older friend than she is of yours. I am worried, as you are worried. I wouldn't make her unhappy for worlds, but if I tell what's on my mind it

would—it—” She let her voice trail off into silence.

Alice inquired cautiously, “What does it begin with? I mean, the thing you know or suspect about John; what letter does it begin with? I suppose not by any chance a ‘B’?”

“I was thinking of an ‘R,’ ” Virgie whispered, “but it could be started with a ‘B.’ ”

“And does it end with a ‘y’?”

“It might end with a ‘y.’ ”

“Good gracious! how dreadful! I hope it is something about me?”

“But it isn’t,” Virgie protested, bewildered, “it has nothing whatever to do with you.”

“Good *gracious!* Then it’s another occasion. How perfectly *awful!* Lucia will have to know, sooner or later. If it’s a *habit* with him. . . .”

It was then that John showed himself in the doorway of the summerhouse. Taking for granted that Alice had either told about the housebreaking in Kansas City or was about to do so, he decided to throw himself upon their mercy by telling how his uncle had gotten him in his power and how, in order to keep his place in the eating house until he could launch out for himself, he had gone through the perfunctory motions of a house-breaker. So he related all just as it had happened, ending with the explanation,

“Of course until I came to this house I always believed that man to be my uncle. He called me his nephew, and I had no reason to doubt it.” All mention of his mother was omitted.

“But I know I couldn’t really be his nephew and at the same time Lucia’s brother. One must choose between the two. All the same, I can’t come out into the open and

make a clean breast of everything, because, Alice, you see I really did break into your house, and I could never make the police believe I had no evil intentions. They might admit that I am now John Lyle Warring; but that wouldn't affect what I did when I was supposed to be simply the nephew of the restaurant proprietor.

"Now that you know who I am, of course, Alice, you wouldn't, for Lucia's sake, press the suit against me, or appear as a witness—"

"John!" she protested, greatly distressed.

"But the disgrace of the thing would be a terrible blow to her and her father. I wouldn't have them know about it for worlds. I'm not asking secrecy for my sake. If I know my heart, I'm thinking only of their happiness. The publicity of the thing would kill him—Lucia's father; his heart would fail. I didn't feel guilty when I went to Troost Avenue because I knew I'd take nothing away with me. I wish my uncle—as I thought him—had shown himself in his true light when for months he nursed me through sickness, but perhaps he was getting me well in order to use me. Before I came here and learned what it is to live, he rather had me under his thumb. I was afraid of him. I wanted to break away, but somehow lacked the incentive to put up the necessary fight. Now, it's different. I can hardly see myself as I used to be. If my mother had lived—I'd have broken away—"

"Your mother!" Alice echoed, her sympathies going out to him unrestrainedly. "But Lucia's mother died years ago. She was only ten years old. And you couldn't possibly remember her."

"I mean—" But when he tried to say, "The woman I supposed to be my mother," the words

would not come. He said, "Oh well—you understand."

Virgie breathed a deep sigh of relief. "How easy you've made it for us!" she exclaimed gratefully. "How everything has brightened up! I've been desperately worried ever since the night of the robbery—or burglary—"

She laughed aloud. "You can spell it with an 'R' or a 'B.' When Lucia screamed out her warning I rushed to the back window and saw you and an awful man holding a conference in the yard as if you had entered into a conspiracy against us. I knew at once it must be somebody from your former scenes of life."

"I was telling him never to dare set foot in the place again."

"Yes. And now I know he must have been the man you believed to be your uncle. Your description fits him exactly."

"That's the man. Yes, I certainly believed him to be my uncle! But it didn't occur to me you were looking on. No wonder you had a headache. But you didn't tell Lucia! Good girl!" He patted her arm. "Is it all right now?"

She breathed a deeper sigh. "It's wonderful. I feel a different girl. I suppose you went to Kansas City—not to St. Louis at all—and found the jewelry in that wretch's hiding-place?"

"A simple turn of the wrist. But you won't feel that Lucia should know?"

Virgie exclaimed, "We won't tell a soul—will we, Alice? Oh, John, it's so good to have back my old feeling for you!"

He squeezed her hand.

Alice reflected, "But the story would interest Lucia amazingly."

"I'll interest Lucia some other way," John

promised. "Come, girls, join hands and swear to keep mum." Already he held Virgie's in his right hand; he took Alice's hand in his left. "Now, all together: Mum-mum-mum!"

Easily swayed by his bounding spirits, they murmured in unison, "Mum-mum-mum!"

"It's exactly as if our mouths were full of something good to eat!" Alice laughed.

John exclaimed, "Let's get 'em full of something good! I'll call Lucia, and we'll all run off to the ice-cream parlor."

"But supper's nearly ready," Virgie objected; "what would mother say?"

"We're not afraid of anybody but Cousin Glaxton," John declared gaily, "and he's from home."

CHAPTER XXIII

THE ENEMY'S RETURN

The next few days were bright with such trivial happenings and casual talk as apparently lead not one step into the future, as if Time were giving the joy of being alive without exacting increase of age as recompense. The young people were together from morning till night, either at the Warring house or away on picnic excursions. They were so gay that Mrs. Abbottsfield's stiff correctness was not permitted for a moment to go limp; and once, Lucia, not knowing what would become of them without some check, grabbed John by one hand and Alice by the other—Alice, of course, had the Rev. Mr. Tredmill in charge—and rushed the line up to Virgie's mother, exclaiming,

"Aunt Hildegarde! Tell us about the best families!"

And Virgie kept so bright over the recovery of her admiration for John that her mother seldom thought to tell her to hold herself straight.

John had the genius of extracting merriment out of the passing moments as easily as the magicians in the stories used to get gold from sunbeams, and though his jokes might sound flat if repeated out of their settings, at the time of perpetration they forced peals of laughter. One really ached after a day with him.

He could even make you laugh yourself almost ill over impending misfortune as when, for example, they were five miles up the river at 7 p. m. and suddenly Tredmill remembered

that it was Wednesday (fancy forgetting that it was *Wednesday!*) and his prayer-meeting was expected to begin at 7:30. In the mad rush to town John pictured the consternation on the faces of the old faithful Wednesday night guard should their captain fail to appear at stroke of bell; and uttered aphorisms not to be recalled during the hour of devotions.

One might well have imagined that of the five John was by far freest of care, and during much of the time he was able to banish uneasy speculations concerning Blearstead. But there came moments when his heart was as heavy as lead for he knew that the period of his security must be brief.

One afternoon he took a long walk in the country to put his thoughts in order, visiting the cattle-shed where he had changed his clothes on his flight from Kansas City, and after that, the rock at the margin of the bluff where he had not kissed Lucia. Naturally Lucia was supreme in all his meditations, and when he went back in the dusk, he slipped into the house very quietly, enjoying to the full the consciousness of her near presence, yet shrinking from meeting her face to face. The lights were on, and as he closed the front door behind him, he fancied Lucia's eyes must read on his face that which she should never know. How could it be otherwise when all his thoughts and emotions were steeped in love of her?

From this dreamy mood he was startled at hearing the authoritative voice of Edgar Glaxton: "Why are you here, sir?"

For an instant John fancied himself addressed though the walls separated him from the returned lawyer. Had his identity been laid bare? It would be difficult to explain satisfactorily just why he was there!

But almost at once he was set right by hearing the voice of Tredmill in reponse: "I am here to call on Miss Klade." The tone was dignified, neither shrinking nor assertive.

"You will leave at once, sir." Glaxton's voice did not rise, but its quality grew impelling.

Tredmill answered, "Miss Klade will receive me. I am expected."

"As I have told you repeatedly," Glaxton said, "and as a less obtuse man must have known without the telling, your presence in this house is an affront to the master of it. You must go without further words, or force will be employed."

John started toward the door of the front room, but checked himself as he heard Tredmill's calm rejoinder, "Then I shall meet force with force."

"Oh, I see!" Glaxton sneered, suddenly losing his effect of quiet and irresistible power, as he permitted himself to be swayed by personal enmity: "you are a man who denounces other people for their weaknesses while fighting with their weapons. What has become of your doctrine of turning the other cheek?"

"Should you smite me upon the cheek," Tredmill explained, "I'd knock you down. But having defended myself, I should hold no grudge against you. I'd try to meet you afterwards as if the thing hadn't happened. I'd turn to you, as it were, my other cheek. And I fancy you would not care to repeat your offense. The doctrine of turning the other cheek means, to my mind, all absence of rancor and vengeance, and the giving of the aggressor afterwards a fair chance of pursuing kindlier and more peaceful ways."

The fearlessness of Tredmill's manner an-

gered Glaxton beyond prudence. He turned to a third man whose presence John had not suspected. "Simmons, put this gentleman out the door."

John waited no longer. He found the great hulking man-servant advancing with clenched fists upon the minister while his master looked on darkly. "Leave the room this moment," John ordered Simmons, "or I'll break all the important bones in your body."

The man slunk away like a whipped cur.

John turned upon Glaxton. "So you've come back! You seem to have fallen prey to the singular delusion that this is your house. At the risk of being disagreeable I must remind you that you are here wholly upon sufferance. Brother Tredmill I am, as always, delighted to see you. Sit down. Does Alice know you've come?"

"Lucia came to tell me she would be down directly." Tredmill seated himself.

Glaxton's face no longer betrayed anger. What the delicately-formed features spoke, John could not translate. "You have defied me from the first—" His tone was low and smooth—"and if it were only a contest between us two, I should willingly accept your challenge." He leaned with back to the wall and the light was full upon him, yet even so his face looked singularly dark. "As you are aware, however, I should have you at an immense disadvantage. With the police after you for breaking into the Klade house and with the man you called uncle as your accomplice in stripping this place of its jewelry, a single word from me would put irons on your wrists."

The minister laughed scornfully at what he regarded as preposterous accusations. "The

Klade house!" he echoed. "Perhaps you are insinuating that my friend is the Polite Burglar, who terrified Miss Klade in her Troost Avenue home!"

"I mean precisely that. Virgie had the whole confession from John in the summerhouse and Virgie who always confides everything in me ran to me the moment I came home to tell what John imagined she would preserve as a secret. If you doubt my words—supposing John has the hardihood to deny their truth—ask Virgie; or better, ask Miss Klade herself; for when she stepped from the train, the moment she saw John, she recognized him as her midnight visitor. So at least Virgie tells me. Virgie and her mother were there with the car and both observed Miss Klade's air of petrification. However, Virgie says John made a clean breast of it and told her and Miss Klade the story of his life, begging them at the same time not to tell of his burglarious habits to Lucia."

John was speechless, not from his instinct of danger, or because he greatly minded Tredmill's knowing the truth, but from the sickening realization that he had been betrayed by his friend. Tredmill waited to hear the charges repudiated, but intense silence settled upon the room.

Presently Glaxton resumed in measured tones, always looking John full in the face: "But I shall not use this knowledge which Virgie has provided me with, unless I am driven to extremity, for there is somebody else to be considered. By being driven to extremity, I mean finding that you are in any way trying to dislodge me from this house. And by somebody else, I mean your father. From consideration of your father I shall not seek out this

uncle, so-called, and show him up to the world. I realized that you were raised to think him your relative, and it was human nature for you to fall into his evil practices. Nevertheless I think I am justified, in view of the facts I hold, in expecting from you a less antagonistic attitude. I shall not, if you leave me alone, pry into your past life, on your father's account. For I must warn you, my poor young man, that your father's condition is most precarious."

John started toward him, forgetting himself. "Have you seen my father?" his manner was threatening. "Did you follow him? Have you interfered in his plans?"

"The least excitement affects his heart most distressingly."

"His health need not concern you. While you were away, he grew so strong and, as everybody tells me, so different in spirit and hopefulness that I know you are bad medicine for him."

"Whatever strength he gained," Glaxton said gloomily, "he lost during this ill-advised business trip. I have known all along that he was unable to attend to his affairs. That is why he has insisted on keeping me by him."

"Where did you see him, and where have you left him?" John interrupted.

"He is very weak; I think he may never leave home again. As soon as I learned of his rash resolve to attend to business unaided I knew how it would be. In simple mercy I hurried after him—"

"Mercy!" John mocked. "What mercy is there in you?"

Glaxton slightly smiled. "He is in his room upstairs, very, very weak."

John turned to Tredmill unable to hide his

agitation. "I must go to him at once. Another time I'll explain everything about the Troost Avenue business."

Glaxton objected peremptorily. "If you will pardon me—"

John brushed past him and ran up the stairs.

Glaxton called after him, to all appearances with real solicitude: "Gently, John, gently! I beg of you to remember his heart."

CHAPTER XXIV

GLAXTON'S THREAT

Glaxton's warning was not without effect, and John's step was hardly audible as he passed through his "father's" door. He found him dressed, lying upon the bed, and was greatly shocked by his changed face. Its animation was gone. Lines were cut deep in the pallid skin exaggerating the effect of age. Hearing the click of the latch his head turned languidly on the pillow without a lightening of the features.

"What happened?" John brought out with fierce intensity. "What has he done to you?"

"I can't talk," Mr. Warring murmured. "I can't collect my thoughts. It sets my heart fluttering to try. Another time—another time."

John bent over him. "When was it you lost your grip on yourself? Wasn't it after Glaxton hunted you down? I'll drive him from the premises if it's the last thing I ever do."

Mr. Warring cried in distress, "But no, no! That would mean my death. Only he knows how to relieve my distress. Nobody but your Cousin Glaxton knows how to regulate my heart. I'd die without him. You distress me, John, by any such suggestion." He breathed rapidly, laboriously.

The door opened, and Glaxton came quietly into the room. He spoke soothingly to Mr. Warring: "Now that you have greeted your son, I wonder if you hadn't better be very quiet for the remainder of the day."

"Oh, yes—yes," the invalid whispered. "That is what I need; quiet, perfect quiet—not to think or talk or feel the jar of movements." Languidly he reached out to touch John's hand. "It was glorious while it lasted. But my heart is so uncertain— Perfect quietness, that is all I need."

John looked at Glaxton: "Then come with me."

Glaxton smiled faintly and asked the prostrate man, "Can you do without me now? Perhaps you would like to try it without my especial medicine?"

Into the invalid's voice crept a note of irritation, if not of alarm: "But I must have that medicine. You know I must have it, and soon. Run along John, for the present—just for the present; I must have absolute quiet."

Glaxton with slow deliberation seated himself at the bedside. John with clenched teeth went away promising himself to solve the mystery of the lawyer's influence over the millionaire. But once in the hall, another thought presented itself. He turned down the side corridor to Virgie's door.

In answer to his knock, Mrs. Abbottsfield looked out inquiringly.

"I want to speak to Virgie a moment." His tone was colorless.

Virgie came out with slow step and he closed the door after her that they might stand alone in the corridor. Although it was not very light he could see that her eyes were red from weeping. "When did Glaxton bring him home?" he asked in subdued accents.

She spoke in the faint voice of one who has been giving way to violent emotions: "About three hours ago—just after you started away on your walk."

"So short a time," he let his bitterness sound forth, "for him to get from you my secret!"

"Yes," she said faintly. "Is that all, John? 'I'll go back to mother.'"

"Surely it is enough!" he returned sternly. Then he softened. "But I didn't ask you out here to listen to reproaches. I just wanted to say that I've had experience of my own in trying to keep facts from Glaxton. You couldn't hold it back from him. I wanted you to know that I haven't forgotten you're my friend, and I'm going to be your friend till Chapter the Last. That was all, dear Virgie. Now you can run along."

She burst into tears. "You're breaking my heart a second time," she sobbed. "Yes, he forced it out of me. Oh, John, I'm not free—he has a hold over me. I can't explain. You'd not blame me if you knew everything. I had to tell him—he found out there was something, and then I had to tell what it was. If I hadn't—but I was forced. He has a hold over me."

"Don't cry, dear girl. I'm going to break his hold. All the same, I'd like to know what secret he has of yours to make you give him my secret."

"I can never tell that to any one, never. But if you knew, you'd say I did right."

"Would I? Then on the strength of that assurance, I'll say you did right to tell about me. I can't understand it, but I'll say you did right. I'm going to take your hand in the dark—" He reached for it.

She burst into fresh tears. She gasped, "You'll never regret trusting me."

"Am I not sure of that? Well, I should say

so! All the same, I could do for Glaxton if I knew what secret of yours he is holding."

"Yes, you could. But yet I can't explain."

"But can you trust him to keep your secret even after he has forced mine from you as the price for silence?"

"He'll keep the secret for his own sake. To help him make his plans. You can't trust Mr. Glaxton unless his self-interest is on your side."

Hearing a footstep in the main hall, she darted into her room and John retreated, puzzling over his best course of action.

It was Simmons they had overheard. As if unaware of his shadowy hovering, John walked to the head of the staircase to go down to Treadmill. Whether Simmons had received orders from his master or had determined upon personal vengeance never appeared. Suddenly he made a violent forward rush, then leapt straight into the air to fall catlike upon the young man's neck. The movement of his long legs and lithe body as it shot through space with the swiftness of the wind was essentially feline.

John, not anticipating danger before it was upon him, had no chance to jump to one side. He therefore fell flat to the floor causing Simmons to miss his hold upon his collar. The lean body, overbalanced, sought equilibrium by means of the far reach of the arms, but before the bony hands could touch the floor John started to one knee, hurling the giant frame down the stairs.

It reached the floor of the reception hall with a crash and rolled up against the front door with a hollow thud that jarred the windows.

Glaxton ran out of Mr. Warring's bedroom

and glared at John who was rearranging his tie somewhat breathlessly. "You'll kill your father!" he grated.

John answered grimly, "I'll kill Simmons first."

Tredmill, seeing from the parlor door that the man did not rise, hurried to his assistance, but Simmons, groaning dismally, gave him a surly curse and, finding his bones unbroken, crept away.

"Oh," cried Lucia, rushing into the downstairs hall from the back parlor, "what is it?"

John started down the stairs, explaining serenely, "Brother Tredmill is growing impatient for Alice to finish her primping. If she keeps him waiting much longer, I'm afraid he'll pull down the house."

"One moment, please," Glaxton called to John. He came closer and said guardedly, while Lucia followed Tredmill into the front room, "You are going to try to drive me away. Now mark what I say: At your first move against me, I'll sift out all your past and that of the wretch you believed to be your uncle. I'll publish you to the world. I dare say I'll find much more than the fact that for a night you played the burglar. Treat me as a gentleman, John, and I'll let you pass as one. For your father's sake. I'm going to leave it to you to make the next move. But the moment I find that it's a move against me—" he gave him a darkly ominous look— "I'll forget that you are your father's son."

CHAPTER XXV

A SECRET CONFERENCE

With Glaxton in the house and Mr. Warring a helpless invalid, gayety vanished. Life became as staid and discreetly regulated as Mrs. Abbottsfield's manner. John felt that the time had come for him to disappear from Lagville. The baffled police no longer looked for him in this direction—had, possibly, let him slip from mind.

Glaxton would let him go without pursuit; would, if necessary, aid him in slipping away. The lawyer by his air of secret understanding seemed always reminding him of a league between them: if John left him alone, he would not investigate his past, which would necessarily implicate his future. It was, therefore, a period of safety for John; but he regarded it as safety purely for flight; he could see in it no permanency. Even if he could have reconciled himself to Glaxton's domination. John knew Blearstead too well not to anticipate at a day not remote an attempt to wreck him, out of revenge. This was a danger that grew more menacing as the days passed.

Yet he had not the heart to sever his life from Lucia's. His going would instantly betray him as the imposter and when he tried to picture how Lucia would be affected by the news, he stood appalled. He drew the scene of the revelation—Mrs. Abbottsfield's terror; Virgie's amazement; Alice's conviction that, after all, the robbery had been of evil intent; Lucia, all crushed and bleeding; and Mr. War-

ring, perhaps losing his feeble hold upon existence. He found himself caught in those deeper currents of life which not long ago had been unknown to him; he could neither go nor stay.

There was more in his grappling for salvation than the wrecking of Lucia's faith and the losing of her love. What was this mysterious force exerted by Glaxton upon the millionaire? Half a dozen times a day, he would slip to the sick room without noise as much to elude Glaxton as to avoid jarring the sick man's nerves. But if Glaxton was not always there, Simmons was hovering about, fearing John's frown but fearing his master's more.

One afternoon—it was that of the fatal day that brought his Lagville experiences to a climax—John succeeded in finding his “father” unattended. So far as he could find out, both Glaxton and Simmons were out of the house. The old man was sleeping heavily and John suspected that an opiate had been administered to keep him quiet until Glaxton's return. He was agitated by vague suspicions which for some days had haunted him—suspicions apparently incapable of proof; and now to these uneasy and murky fancies was added the intuition that something exceedingly important must be happening or about to happen, otherwise the lawyer would not for so long have relinquished his watchfulness.

He determined to wake the invalid though dreading possible heart-complications. It was only after considerable difficulty that he succeeded in doing so.

“We are alone,” he said as soon as he could hold the other's attention. “Don't be afraid to speak to me frankly. Nobody can hear us.” He bent over the vials on the little stand by

the bedside. "Which of these medicines do you take? And when do you take them?"

Mr. Warring answered in a far-away voice, dealing out the words slowly, with no shade of interest. John listened intently. From the family physician he had learned all about the course of medicine prescribed, and had familiarized himself with each drug and the frequency of its use. The response of the sick man tallied exactly with the physician's exposition.

The young man breathed a sigh of such expansive relief that he was troubled to realize how confidently he had anticipated some discrepancy. He told himself grudgingly that everything was all right—there had been no pernicious substitution—after all it was simply a matter of an unaccountable heart-action. An uncertain heart is always mysterious to one whose heart is normal, but it is one of nature's mysteries and John had begun to fear this might be one of man's.

He seated himself at the bedside, and took the invalid's hand. "Father, are you satisfied with the way things are moving along? Doesn't Glaxton get on your nerves? I'd like to see him put out of the house. What about it?"

The pallid face grew whiter. For a few moments there was no response, then his hand closed on John's as he whispered, "He holds all of my affairs in his hands. All the threads. Nobody else could untangle them," he panted, his bosom beginning to heave alarmingly. "That's one reason why I went away. To find out if I couldn't unsnarl the lumber interests in a way to put you at the head of the yards. But there's nothing I could do. Everything's—fixed."

"How did he get such control?"

"I don't know, John. Sometimes I wonder. But I don't know. For a long time I haven't been myself. But wasn't that a blessed time when you first came! Of course I believe your Cousin Glaxton is honest." His fingers grew tense. "I must believe it. I must!" He looked wildly at the other.

"If he is—of course. . . . But if he isn't—"

"You mustn't say 'if.' In that case he could ruin us all. Because everything is in his hands. If he were antagonized he could put on the screws; legally. But he's all right. He must be. I won't think anything else."

"I don't like him, father. And I will get rid of him with your permission."

"It's too late, my boy. It's too late. And we must believe he is honest. I think he is. He must be. And besides, nobody else can keep my heart from hammering the life out of me."

"Your heart was all right while he was away."

"Of course it might seem all right for months at a time. But when it goes wrong, Glaxton knows how to quiet it. That medicine on the table—well, it's the best our doctor can do. I take it to please him. Tonics and all that. But what really soothes me isn't on that table. Glaxton seems to know everything. Best of all, he knows how to quiet me."

"Does the doctor know what secret medicine he gives you?"

"Why, my dear boy, your Cousin Glaxton gives me only what you see there. He has no medicine in the sense you mean, though we refer to it as 'medicine.' It is simply a magnetic treatment. He is a remarkably magnetic man. He gets me under control."

John recalled Glaxton's dark face and was ready to admit his powerful individuality. He shuddered. "Father, let me nurse you. I'll do exactly as the doctor advises, and have you well again. We'll go to the bank as we did when I first came, and take our auto rides with Lucia—"

The sweat stood upon Mr. Warring's brow. "But it isn't the doctor who can help me, it isn't you, dear boy, it's Glaxton. He has the touch."

John asked abruptly, "Is it really your wish, as Glaxton pretends, that Brother Tredmill should not come to this house?"

"You mustn't talk about that. You'd better not talk to me any longer. Just let me lie still, oh, as still as death. After a time my heart gets right, if I lie very still."

It was impossible for John to close his eyes to the fact that he was making the invalid worse, but he persisted. "What shall be done with the box of money that we buried in the garden?"

Mr. Warring grasped his arm. "Hush—hush! You say no one can hear us talking, but you can never be sure." His breath came with distressing rapidity like that of a spent runner. "The green liquid—quick!"

John served him expertly and he was soon quieted. After a silence he murmured, "Don't talk to me about such things, my dear boy, until I am stronger, or it will be the death of me." After a longer silence, he patted John's hand affectionately. "I'm growing quite easy, now. You'd better leave me, dear boy. I'm going to try to sleep. I'd rather your Cousin Glaxton didn't know I'd been awake. If he finds out you've been here, he'll get the whole story from me. Simmons told him about the

dirt on the spade and before I knew what I was about I'd described the spot where the box was hidden away. Your Cousin Glaxton has a touch. He soothes me. He makes me tell him everything."

John gave a short laugh. "Then you think Glaxton got the box?"

"Of course he wouldn't take it, John," the other sighed reproachfully. "Your Cousin Glaxton is honest. We must believe that. But he knows where it is—I had to tell him. He has such a touch; so magnetic."

"Listen, father—" John bent over him. "I changed the hiding-place of the box before Simmons or Glaxton could get to it. Of course they've looked for it in the summerhouse. And finding it gone, of course they think I've carried it away for safe keeping."

Mr. Warring opened and closed his eyes rapidly. His breathing was regular. He spoke in carefully repressed tones: "My boy, you've told me a great piece of news. Where did you put it?—but no; don't tell me. Let it be your secret alone." A smile flickered over the pinched features. "See that you guard it well. Now let me sleep."

John rose and bent over him stirred by conflicting remorse and affection—remorse at the deceptive part he was playing, affection that had strengthened from the hour of their meeting. "Have I given you a little courage?" he asked wistfully.

"Son, guard that secret. Lucia's happiness may depend upon it."

"Her happiness is dearer to me than my life," John declared fervently.

"I know it is. You have made me a happy man."

CHAPTER XXVI

BETTIE ONCE MORE TO THE RESCUE

When John went down stairs, Lucia, Virgie and Alice, in the sitting-room, were planning to spend the evening hour at the picture-play where the Rev. Mr. Tredmill would assuredly join them. In these days Tredmill was perhaps less minister than lover. At any rate it was well-known that he disapproved of all moving-pictures save those of an educational value which neither thrill nor provoke to laughter; yet was he willing, for the sake of Alice's nearness, to gaze upon protracted kissings, the smashing of dishes and flinging about of pies, and breakneck races through crowded city streets.

John passed the door with his sunny smile to indicate that in spirit he was with the girls, then left the house on one of his long meditative walks. Many a time afterward he mused with regret upon this wasted opportunity of spending the afternoon with Lucia: watching the smiles gather in her eyes, and the light of affection come and go about her happy mouth. If one could but know at rise of sun that one's day of fate has dawned, how jealously would the hours be hoarded!

When he came back to town from his loitering exploration of country lanes it was growing dark, less from the lateness of the hour than from gathering clouds. From watching the heaving masses rolling up from the south he became suddenly aware that he was being followed and then it flashed upon him that

ever since his approach to the town-limits somebody had been dogging his footsteps.

In selecting a short-cut home he had plunged into a malodorous alley between the rear walls of small sheds and the bulging fences of frowsy back lots. Some one who had been across the street from him before his coming to this most squalid section of Lagville, now crept into the same obscurity. John had given no heed to the elusive figure and could not have told if it was that of a man or a woman.

He stopped short, thrilled by the misgiving that at last the detectives had penetrated his disguise.

The obscure form instead of pausing at the head of the alley or slackening its pace rapidly approached. It was a young woman; and as she drew near the pretty features, the rounded outlines of vigorous youth, the characteristic movements of independent ease, recalled a picture from his Kansas City life.

"Bettie!" he exclaimed, amazed, but immensely relieved.

He seized her hands and if, as Lucia had declared, a more intimate greeting on his part was wrong, he committed the crime in thought; for though their lips did not meet, in his heart he kissed her. "Bettie! How wonderful!" And he questioned her anxiously.

"Yes, I'll explain everything," she fluttered. "That's why I'm here. But where can we talk without people seeing us?"

This was a difficult problem and the best solution he could think of was the Warring automobile. He hurried away for it while she waited near the head of the alley.

Presently they were speeding along the country roads he had grown to know so well from his solitary rambles. Amidst their quiet love-

liness it sounded oddly incongruous when Bettie explained that her father's houseboat was tied up among the willows about half a mile above town, and that Blearstead was on the boat, and Cleek as well.

"We've been there two days," she said, "but Pa keeps such a sharp eye out that this is the first time I've had a chance to warn you."

He asked her, forebodingly, what they meant to do.

"Blearstead has come to get money out of Mr. Glaxton by selling him the secret that you're only John Walters, no kin to Mr. Warring at all. Cleek is a witness. They're together right now. I listened a long time to their scheming. Blearstead was afraid to confess that he was the one made you act the part of the kidnapped son. But Mr. Glaxton got it out of him. He wouldn't pay over a cent till he knew everything—or thought he knew everything. But there is something he never found out, although he is so smart. They wrangled by the hour. At last Blearstead owned up that it was his scheme. Then Mr. Glaxton wanted to know where a box was that he said you'd buried in the summerhouse and afterwards had carried away. But Blearstead didn't know. Or he said he didn't. I don't think Mr. Glaxton believed that. Pa sits there saying nothing. He did his talking to Blearstead before the frame-up. All his part is to get some of the money for bringing Blearstead and Cleek in the boat. Mr. Glaxton had a witness with him to take everything down."

John was surprised at the notion of Simmons as a secretary.

"I can't think of his name, but he runs the biggest store here in town."

John gasped, "Eugene Ware?"

"That's the one."

John muttered, "Please don't say a word for a few minutes. I want to fit my mind to the suit of ideas you've handed me." After a half-mile taken at terrific speed, he slowed down. "What's the game, Bettie?"

"You will be arrested early in the morning as an imposter. Pa and Blearstead and Cleek are to be given that long to get themselves and the boat safe away. Ma knows a secret that would—" she checked herself. "Anyway, she's afraid to say her name's her own. Some day I may tell you. But now you've got to hide out."

"Every one has his secret," John murmured, thinking of Virgie's strange secretiveness. "Does your mother know something that would give me a hold on Glaxton?"

"I don't think *I'd* better say any more about that. You know I'd tell you if I thought I could. I've tried to be your friend—"

"You have been right in Class A, Bettie." He drew a long breath. "Well—this is the end of my story. I knew it would come some day; but 'some day' never means today, does it! So I've a respite until morning?"

"Yes, that's the bargain so Blearstead won't get caught. But you'll need all of tonight for travel if you give them the slip. Glaxton was something awful when they told him how he'd been fooled by you, and that Eugene Ware fellow was like a crazy man."

John's teeth clenched ominously. "I'll face 'em," he said grimly. "I'll know how to deal with a crazy man." Then his features relaxed. He gave her a smile. "If you could come with me, we wouldn't ask odds of the world. You could get me out of every kind of scrape that's invented."

"Oh, John!" She caught her breath. "But they'd miss me, and that would make it easier for them to find you."

"Yes," he assented absently.

She closed her eyes, too proud for him to catch the gleam of sudden tears. "Of course," she faltered, "if I dressed up like a man—"

He roused himself and turned the car about. "Bettie, once I wrote you a letter when I was feeling awful blue and hadn't seen much of the world because I hadn't seen Lagville—understand? This is something I'm trying to put real close to your heart. What I mean is that when I wrote that letter—I hadn't met Lucia. See?"

The light faded from her face.

"But after seeing her—well, I've got to go on alone. That's what it means, dear. The world I lived in when you and I went fishing and boating and were so happy together, is one place. And the world I've lived in since I've known Lucia is another. Dear faithful Bettie, there isn't any bridge between. If there is I haven't found it. And if I had found it—I couldn't come back."

"I don't know what you're talking about," she complained, her lip between her teeth.

"Of course you wouldn't. I'm just rambling on. It only means that I must live alone, while I live—because of Lucia. But, thank God! I'll live a free man, while I live—because of you. There are two names I'll bless with my last breath and yours is one of them."

"Bettie comes before Lucia," she choked, then tried a brave laugh as he offered, "But of course a person's heart doesn't beat alphabetically!"

From over the hilltops the lights of Lagville were visible. Bettie held her head high. "I

didn't tell you, John, that I have a gentleman friend."

"I hope he's worthy of you," he cried fervently.

"He has all kinds of money." She nodded her head emphatically.

"I wonder if he'd lend any to a poor beggar?"

"And handsome—oh, just so *handsome!*"

"Just like that?" John teased. "Gracious!"

His manner forced a reluctant smile to her lips. She nodded her pretty little head and murmured, "He's crazy about me."

"Then he's not only rich, but a man of sense."

"But I'm going to turn him down." She flung out her hand with the palm from her: "just like that. I'm going to live like you, alone—all alone—" Her voice steadied itself, but her countenance was preternaturally solemn: "And alone and alone and alone—"

He stopped the car at the suburbs and pressed her hand to his cheek, then spoke in the whimsical manner habitual to him even in moments of deepest gloom: "Us alone people must say good-by now! If Glaxton or my uncle saw us together we'd not have the ghost of a chance to give them the slip."

When he stepped through the doorway of the Warring residence after putting the automobile away, the clock was striking nine.

Lucia ran to meet him in the hall. "Where *have* you been? We've been ready to go to the picture-show a long time, but you're so late we've had to wait for the second show. The others have gone on ahead." She looked at him reproachfully. "I hope my brother isn't going to keep late hours."

He smiled guiltily, wondering if by any

magic she could detect the Bettie-perfume on his coatsleeve. "Yes, I know nine o'clock is something terrible!"

She searched his face. "What is it, John?"

"Has Glaxton come home?"

She made a comical grimace. "No—let's forget him. Come, we must run to overtake our crowd."

"Listen to me, dear girl: there's something very important that I must see about—something about father; and there's not a second to lose. I must be with him alone before Glaxton comes back. So I can't go with you. Tell the others—no, don't tell them how dreadfully necessary this is or they might do something to interfere, meaning to help. Tell them I have a headache. It'll be the truth. I could certainly prove up my claim to a good one, Lucia!"

"My poor John!" All at once she was sweet commiseration. "I'm so, so sorry." She stroked his forehead. "Of course I'll miss you all the evening. But I'll be thinking of you, hoping you are getting a good rest. And anyway I'm glad to have this chance to tell you good-by." She looked up into his face.

He murmured with constraint, "Good-night."

Her hand was on his shoulder: "Still glad to have your little sister?"

"Of course," he muttered confusedly.

She laughed. "Oh, you cold-hearted, matter-of-fact brother!" Suddenly her arm slipped about his neck. "You're going to kiss me good-night if it's the last act of your life. You never have. And if the mere prospect of it makes you blush like this, you ought to be practicing during the day."

"Listen to me, little Golden Head," he pro-

tested. "I have something on hand that's no end important and it must be finished up before Glaxton comes home. If I stay another minute here with you, adorable little Sunshine Mouth, big Eyes of Blue—I'm afraid I'll eat you up."

He broke from her embrace and fled upstairs.

CHAPTER XXVII

THE MIDNIGHT WATCHER

In the upstairs hall John paused at the balustrade until he had heard Lucia pass from the house and click behind her the latch of the yard-gate. Then he moved along the wall with exceeding care. All that he could hope to accomplish in the Warring residence must be done now, before Glaxton came back from the houseboat; and although, viewed from one angle, it might appear an amazing coincidence should he successfully interpose in a matter of life and death at the only time such interference was possible, viewed otherwise, it appeared reasonable that he might accomplish his purpose. Since it was arranged to arrest him in the morning, Glaxton would feel it essential to his purpose that Mr. Warring should not interfere. If there was ever a time, therefore, when he administered a drug unprescribed by the physician, it would be tonight, and in all probability soon after his return. John had set himself the task of discovering if Mr. Warring's fluctuations of health were not due to this sinister cause.

He opened his "father's" door without rousing the invalid, whose breathing suggested that he was resting under the influence of an opiate. It was the opinion of the family physician that opiates are better suited than anything else to meet the frailties of the flesh, perhaps from the philosophy that it is better not to feel one's illness than to contend against it. Although John was aware that Glaxton had

the doctor's sanction in administering the green liquid, he was convinced not only that Glaxton's manner of giving it was gravely injurious, but that the lawyer knew this to be the case yet persisted under the cloak of authority with evil intent.

As this was assuredly his last chance to put his theory to the test, so it had been his first, and realizing that Glaxton might make his appearance at any moment, and that Simmons might be somewhere about the place, he went swiftly and noiselessly to work, confident that he would not arouse the sleeper.

After the precaution of a swift survey of the adjoining chamber—Glaxton's bedroom—he left open the communicating door just as he had found it, then stealthily crossed to the side of the room opposite the bed. The trunk was exactly as he and Mr. Warring had left it after removing the box of banknotes; that is, the lid stood ajar sufficiently to give a glimpse of the mixed-up contents of papers and old letters. The millionaire could have found no securer place for the concealment of treasure. The very fact that the lid could not be locked would disarm suspicion on the part of Glaxton, while Mr. Warring, having the trunk before his eyes whenever he looked across the room from his bed could instantly note any alteration in its position.

John raised the lid, testing it carefully to make sure that it would give forth no warning squeak of the hinges, then drew forth bags of old letters and photographs, burdening himself with as much of the trunk's contents as he could carry without danger of spilling anything on the way. These accumulations of the past, the dregs of yesterdays, he bore to his room which was situated diagonally across the

hall. Heaping his load carelessly in a corner, he darted back, this time carrying a sheet, into which he gathered the loose letters and papers. In his room once more, he locked himself in, and, working in feverish haste, assembled such articles as he meant to carry away with him on his long flight. It made but a small bundle which he tossed from the window into the midst of a flowering bridalwreath shrub.

Leaving his key in the lock, he climbed out the window upon the roof of a side-porch, whose pillar brought him safely to the ground. Simmons was not in sight; doubtless he was up the river with his master. John circled the house, came in through the front door and returned to the invalid's room.

The trunk had been left wide open. Mr. Warring still slept profoundly. John climbed into the trunk, pulled down the lid in its old position and waited. As he had foreseen, the crack, resulting from the lid's failure to close down, gave him all the air he would need while providing him with a convenient spyhole. He had a full view not only of the bed but of the medicine-table.

The trunk was large enough to insure him against painful cramping and excitement promised to make short work of his period of waiting.

The first person to come was Simmons. He glided noiselessly into the room like an uncanny shadow endowed with independent life, poked his long head into his master's apartment, then slipped across the hall to pause before John's room. The watcher did not doubt that he was finding out whether or not the door was locked. The key in the lock would convince him that John was in his room, and if he had heard of the headache, as probably he

had, since he seemed to gather everything afloat, he would believe John safely in bed.

Simmons went down stairs, and now he made no effort to move noiselessly. If he had suspected that John's headache was assumed, the key in the lock had convinced him otherwise, and he believed nobody else was at home.

Some time later, the family came back from the "opera house;" Mrs. Abbottsfield, Virgie, Alice and Lucia. At the same time Glaxton showed up from the garden, causing John to wonder if he had been there with Simmons waiting with the idea that the headache might pass off when the others came home.

John could hear Glaxton hypocritically expressing surprise that "his young friend" was not with the young people, and he heard Lucia explaining why he had gone to bed at an early hour. For half an hour the house was filled with the noises of people taking farewell of the day, which gradually faded away to longer and longer silences emphasized by the sudden shudder of a window or creaking of a floor.

Glaxton had gone into his room from the hall and John heard him undressing and after awhile began to fear that all his pains had been for nothing. The lights were turned off. The lawyer was in bed. Still he waited although uneasily conscious of the need of time for his intended flight.

Suddenly a beam of light penetrated the crack between trunk and lid, causing him to give so sudden a start that his heart jumped with the fear that he had betrayed himself. Glaxton had left his bed, had come barefooted into the room, and had switched on the light in the ceiling. Had he caught sight of John's shrinking eye? He glided like a ghost, in his long white nightdress, to lock the hall-

door, then went to a cabinet out of the watcher's line of vision. When he came in sight he carried in his hand a tiny bottle.

John was seeing enacted before him as in a play the suspicion that for days had tormented him. Glaxton removed the stopper from the vial, then as from an after-thought, shut off the ceiling-light, leaving the room in profound darkness. After a moment, the night-light over the medicine-table was shining greenly. It brought out the lawyer's dark features as in a halo of baleful glory. As he held the vial over one of the table-glasses, his hand was as steady as a rock.

Several drops were counted into the glass which was then filled one-third with water. Glaxton placed a thick piece of ice in the water and moved the glass within easy reach of the invalid's hand. Instead of carrying the vial back to the cabinet he slipped it into a pocket of his robe, stood a moment in thought, then went to the wall where hung the landscape painting. He drew from behind it the little key which, as John knew, and perhaps as Glaxton suspected, belonged to the money-box.

He stood frowning at the key, then glancing at the recumbent figure of the unconscious man, and although he was removed from the circle of light above the night-light, his frown was plainly visible.

So he knew the key's hiding-place! Had he forced the knowledge from the owner? Doubtless. John supposed Mr. Warring had drawn forth the key on the night of his leaving town, to let John know where it was to be found in case of accident. Had Mr. Warring anticipated while the box was being bur-

ied that his heart would fail? Or in other words that Glaxton would find him?

Glaxton restored the key and went back to his room. The light was switched off, showing that the lawyer could regulate the invalid's night-light from his own bed. No doubt when he was ready for Mr. Warring to wake up, he would turn on his light; Mr. Warring would find the ice-water. . . .

At last regular breathing from the next room told the watcher that the lawyer was asleep. John crept from his hiding-place, stealthily poured out the contents of the suspicious glass, replaced it with pure ice-water and succeeded in unlocking the door and passing out undetected. He crept to the front of the long dark hall by pressing his hand for safety along the wall. He was almost as much surprised as relieved to discover a line of light under the last door on his right. He tapped upon the door ever so gently.

It was Lucia's door, across the hall from the guest-room now occupied by Alice. At first there was no response, then, as if Lucia had persuaded herself that she had heard something, she asked, startled, "What is that?"

John hesitated as if unable to answer the simple inquiry. Then he said, guardedly, "Your brother."

There was a faint cry of pleasure.

"Wait a minute," Lucia cried excitedly yet restrainedly, taking warning from his cautious tone. In less than a minute she was in the doorway, presented by an electric candle as a most bewitching picture. Over the black cape hastily donned to hide neck and shoulders her hair fell like a shower of gold.

"Come in," she whispered delightedly. Then her face changed to indefinite tenderness.

"You poor boy, that headache hasn't let you sleep a wink! I'm so sorry—I wish I could change heads with you. Come right in; I'm not a bit sleepy. I've been sitting by the window for an hour. The sky is wonderful, tonight. I don't see how anybody can close his eyes to it. I was wondering if you could."

He interposed tensely, "Lucia, I've something to tell you, and I'm in a great hurry. And in a great stress. No, I mustn't come in. Will you slip down to the garden? Glaxton mustn't hear you. I'll be waiting there. I know how unconventional this must seem—"

"Oh, you ridiculous boy!" she laughed without sound, her eyes dancing. "Half the time you don't seem to realize that you are kin to me! Do I want a conventional brother? If there's such a dreadful hurry—I can see by your face that something has happened—"

"Yes, yes, something has happened, Lucia."

"Then I'll come just as I am—" Her face grew anxious. "I'll not stop for my shoes and stockings—"

"You'd better, Lucia. You need more things on, there's such a dew."

"Then come in while I get ready, for if you stand there, darling, Mr. Glaxton will be sure to pop out of his door and catch you." She caught his hand to draw him in out of danger. "I know something dreadful is the matter," she murmured, "but I was feeling so lonesome and the sight of you is so filling for an empty heart that I can't help feeling this is a lark! May I feel that it is a lark, John?"

Something was drawing him toward her infinitely stronger than the strength of her gleaming white arm, but he resisted with the will-

power that lent his face an aspect of granite grimness.

“Dear girl, it isn’t Glaxton I’m afraid of just now. . . . I’ll wait for you in the garden.”

CHAPTER XXVIII

LUCIA IN THE GARDEN

When Lucia reached the summerhouse, John was waiting in the dark. The night was gloriously warm and every touch of the breeze was a caress. Heavy clouds were breaking up, showing here and there brief spaces of the sky intensely blue like Lucia's eyes. Almost overhead through snowy laces of vapor-curtain the moon occasionally showed a gleaming edge of its spinning disc. The garden shrubberies and flower-beds pressed nearer with their perfumes and sometimes when the moon burst triumphantly free from its entanglements the high house shot up like a fairy palace created by a thought from the spot where nothing had been but a shadow-dream.

"I know how deeply in earnest you are," she sighed as they seated themselves on the rustic bench. "It's all in your face and manner. But oh, I want to play! The night is divine. It reminds me that we are divine; and ought to play."

"Dear girl, I am truly in earnest. And have very little time for what I must do. You may play when I am gone."

"Gone!" she echoed uneasily. "But you will not leave me, John."

"So much must be done before morning. I'm going to ask you to pay the closest attention to everything I say; please don't interrupt. If you don't interrupt I'll find it easier to explain."

"But how can I pay close attention? Look,

the clouds are always interrupting by changing their shapes. Do you see that pretty lady up there? And a horse to carry her away on some great sky-adventure. She's changing—she's changing—oh, fickle lady! Now she's an owl. Do you see that she's an owl? What a wise lady to be out so late!"

Unable to resist this sprightliness he laughed, then laid his finger on her lips. "Dear girl, you really must grow serious."

She kissed his finger gayly but he could no longer smile. "Don't stop me to wonder about this or that, for when I've finished, you'll understand everything."

"But I'm not in a hurry as you are, John, and from the way you begin, I'm sure I'll not enjoy knowing what you call 'everything.' Are you going to make your sister unhappy? The moon is coming out of shadow again—hold your face this way, John, so I can look into your eyes."

He returned her look so intently that her eyes fell. She faltered, "What is it all about? Are you going to end by doing as the rest of us have done—let Cousin Glaxton get on your nerves?" Her voice, all its sprightliness gone, died away to a plaintive whisper.

He spoke rapidly, driving straight toward his end: "There's a part of my life you've never heard of, and a part I've purposely twisted to give you a wrong impression. Now I want you to know the whole truth in as few words as possible. There's my mother for instance. You don't know about her."

"Your mother!" she protested. Then quickly, "But of course—I understand."

"She was a fine woman, Lucia. As poor as she could be, with health all gone, her last year, but working like a slave to make some-

thing of me. That was her life—trying to lift me up.”

Lucia commented sympathetically, “The only mother you ever knew.”

“I was too young to understand her sacrifices. I let mother give herself for me—”

“She did all that, darling, but don’t call her ‘mother,’ for our dear mother alone has the right—”

“But she was indeed—she was mother to me.”

“I know she was splendid to make you what you are. But I can’t understand. You thought the man who kidnapped you was your father. I don’t see how the wife of such a creature could have been the woman you describe.”

“She was determined to bring me up as honest as the day. I told you I ran away from home. But it was mother who ran away, taking me with her, and we couldn’t be found, until an uncle came upon us after I was grown, in Kansas City—”

“But you told us you’d never been in Kansas City.”

“There were certain imperative reasons why I told you various things that I’m trying now to set straight. That uncle found me in Kansas City and mother was too broken in strength to try to escape from him as she had from my father—”

“Your father! Oh, *don’t!*”

“My kidnapper. My mother’s husband. Let me go on, Lucia: When my mother died, I had the bad luck to break my leg, and soon after, break it over. My mother’s brother seemed my only friend. He didn’t spare money or care, but now I know his one object was to get me in his power. I felt under obligations.

So when I could hobble around I helped in the restaurant, just waiting till I had fully recovered in order to skip out for myself. But about that time I found out that he was a housebreaker as well as a brother of the kidnapper. My father—the kidnapper—was dead and my uncle—his name is Blearstead—came into possession of the old suitcase with the letters and means of identification. I got them from him; not, as I told you, from the kidnapper on his dying bed. I wonder if you are beginning to understand?"

She put her hands to her head. "What is all this you are telling me?" She gasped. "I understand nothing at all. The more you say, the more I am confused."

"I don't know how to tell it—that's my trouble. Alice and Virgie know a little of the story. Ask them. I'll not go into that. What you must understand isn't about me, after all. I don't matter. I'm nobody. It's your father's danger I want to press home." In quick, short phrases he related his experience in the invalid's room. Her horror over this revelation, coming on top of her utter bewilderment, left her without power of speech.

"That's the cause of your father's sudden changes," he explained. "You must tell what I have seen to the doctor. To every one. To Brother Treadmill. Even Eugene Ware will help you—yes, Eugene Ware. Your father must not be left alone with that wretch another night."

"But you!" she gasped, terror-stricken. "You must prevent it. You must!"

"I cannot help."

"You must. You can do all that should be done. Why do you say you won't be here, John?"

"If I were in reality Mr. Warring's son, I could do everything. But I am not what you suppose."

He started up desperately, wrung by the agony of trying to make her see the naked truth. "If I should stay here to proclaim what I discovered a short time ago, nobody would believe my accusations. Because, this afternoon, Glaxton found out what I am trying to show you: that the little boy kidnapped by my father was drowned by his confederate, the nursery-maid. Glaxton is prepared to have me arrested in the morning. What I might say could not save your father who has grown so dear to me. I should be mocked and silenced."

Lucia sat like a stone.

He burst out incoherently, "Alice can tell you why I came to Lagville. And Virgie. I acted this part purely for self-protection. You'll never forgive—or my friends—Brother Tredmill—I always had to dread the time when it must end, my one happy experience. My—"

He retreated blindly. "Oh, Lucia, I am not your brother, I'm not related to Mr. Warring in any way. I'm nothing but a homeless wanderer who must go now without even telling you good-by, but who, wherever he goes, will carry in his heart a love for you that will not die though you should die."

He rushed from the summerhouse, snatched up the bundle from the shrubbery, and leapt the fence that separated the garden from the road.

CHAPTER XXIX

VIRGIE DINES OUT

One afternoon in May, a young fellow in khaki climbed the same flight of iron stairs leading to the waiting room of the Kansas City Union Station that he had ascended three years before, and, as on that occasion, quickly sought a distant part of the town though not now the environs of Smiling Lane. Intimate knowledge of the city enabled him without loss of time to reach a row of narrow-chested brick buildings off the streetcar lines. He was looking for lodgings and he remembered that this was a quiet spot with the quietness not of refined leisure but of weary toil.

It was a street practically unknown to Blearstead, and the house whose bell the young soldier was ringing, was the property, or, as he remembered, had three years ago been the property, of Mrs. Abbottsfield. He recalled how Virgie and Lucia had joked about the "boom" failing to raise property-values in this section, and how Mrs. Abbottsfield, renting out the place as a boarding-house, had been rather unsuccessful in the collection of rents.

He had come there, then, both for security from recognition and out of sentimental reasons; but when the landlady opened the door he could not have been more greatly shocked had she turned into a policeman, shouting, "You are wanted for impersonating the Warring heir!"

In the case of a policeman he should have preserved admirable calm, while swiftly medi-

tating immediate flight. The same calmness he presented to the woman, but finding himself unrecognized, flight was out of the question.

"You are the lady of the house?" he gravely inquired, taking the precaution, however, to alter his tone.

The lady who was actually Mrs. Abbottsfield, preserved her stately bearing, and her voice was as precise and carefully modulated as of yore; but her eyes were dimmed, for some of the light had vanished from her face. Her nose-glasses still swung by the slender gold chain against her bosom, but she did not lift them in the old gallant manner.

"Yes, I am the landlady." She had the air of not looking at him as if from very courtesy he might be prompted to refrain from minutely observing her.

He had never felt congeniality in their association. He liked to get close to people, even iceberg-people, if they could be melted. But he could not recall in Mrs. Abbottsfield any indication of a thaw. However, she was so vitally a part of the happiest days of his life that he felt like throwing his arms about her in a hearty embrace, thus, to some degree, grasping the atmosphere of the past.

His efforts at restraint made him seem cold enough to suit even her, and they discussed terms stiffly.

Shortly afterward he was installed in a plain little room on the top-most floor—the third—with a view of kitchen roofs and stovepipe-chimneys, and here he meditated profoundly upon the situation. With young men in khaki everywhere, there was small danger of his uniform calling attention to his face; rather, it lent a certain obscurity of distinction for which he was grateful. It was his intention

to remain in the state only long enough to find out what had become of his former friends, and thanks to the evident misfortune that had reduced Mrs. Abbottsfield to play the landlady in her own house, once a place held in slight estimation, his stay need not be prolonged.

From her—or, if he could not summon the courage to break through her icy reserve, from her daughter—he could learn all he craved to know about Lucia; in spite of whatever repugnance she might feel for the part he had played in Lagville, the conviction remained that she was his friend.

But why was Mrs. Abbottsfield keeping lodgings in her dingy brick so obscurely situated? What had separated her and Virgie from the millionaire? Possibly Mr. Warring was dead—and John's heart burned as he reflected in what manner he might have come by his death; but it was not possible that Lucia with all her inherited wealth could be living here, nor that with her deep affection for the Abbottsfields she could have made their stay in her home unwelcome. If Lucia were dwelling under this roof, he thought some mysterious force must tell him so.

At last he approached and almost accepted these dismal conclusions: Mr. Warring was dead; Lucia and Eugene Ware were married; and Virgie and her mother, unwilling to live with them, had come to the house they had so often joked about, to lead independent lives. Eugene Ware was not the man to want other people in his house—or in his wife's house. What had become of Glaxton? Had he been suspected in connection with Mr. Warring's illness or death? No doubt he had escaped with a large part of the Warring fortune;

but he must have left the house and grounds in Lagville, at least!

John would like to have known that Lucia was happy—he gave a sigh that sounded like a groan. He had hoped much from the passing of time, but it seemed to have slipped over him too smoothly to wear away the keen edges of his regret. Perhaps it was because the War, so utterly at variance with all the rest of his life, had, at the end, left him where it had taken him up.

Later, by patrolling the pavement before the house, John succeeded in intercepting Virgie on her way home from office-work. How astonishingly unchanged! The kingdoms of Europe were altered, the spirit of America was reborn, but Virgie's long nose, and tall, flat-chested figure seemed as immutable as the Constitution.

He met her at the corner that they might be unobserved from the house, and she would have passed him for, like her mother, she had grown accustomed to keep her eyes upon the ground.

“Virgie!”

Of course she was glad—that, first of all. Then surprise rushed upon her and the remembrance that he had deceived all Lagville; but the glow in the sallow cheeks came from her sheer delight.

“John!” She grasped his hand. “I don't care about anything else,” she stammered. “You are John!” How could she think of him as a criminal with his soldierly bearing, his frank smile, his wonderful friendliness and all the delightful memories peeping over her shoulder to whisper, “Don't forget us.” Somehow, in spite of facts she had never been able to think of him other than as an innocent man

caught in a net of misfortunes. His own faith in his righteous intentions had always been contagious.

"I must talk to you where we can be alone," he pleaded. "Tell me the place. I'll explain everything I know and you must hand me all I don't."

Breathless, she named a nearby restaurant where she generally got something to eat of an evening—not very much, he was afraid. Her mother, she explained, had no appetite after 1 p. m. Therefore she could dine with him without causing inquiry. They parted to meet at a later hour at the restaurant of her choice.

Seated in an obscure corner with an abundant dinner before them, he could not restrain his impatience to learn what had been taking place in Lagville during his long absence, but Virgie would tell nothing till he had given an account of himself.

"Don't be in a hurry to find out about Lagville," she warned, "for you won't enjoy what I have to tell. And besides, I'm a million times more interested just now in you than in us. This is my first meal with a real soldier—"

"Don't call me that; I'm nothing of the sort."

"But your uniform!"

He gave a wry smile. "Oh, I have a right to wear that. But I'm not a real soldier; though it isn't my fault. Nobody wanted to get to France worse than I did. But talk away, Virgie. Just to hear your voice jars loose a thousand bits of talk and laughter and dreaming that got wedged in my brain three years ago. How natural you are! It's wonderful!"

But she would not talk until he had explained himself.

"Very well," he said resignedly. "The night I left Lagville I hit the trail for Old Mexico—over the border to the mountains where the gold and silver mines grow ripe. I got a clerical job with a company that had let most of its important men go because of unsettled conditions. A small salary didn't discourage me; I'd have hung on for food and rent to keep clear of the police. I knew Glaxton wouldn't leave a stone unturned to nab me and of course Blearstead in the underground world would be working with him. But you can't think how safe I was! That was the only luxury I enjoyed but it did something to sweeten my tortilla—that's the nightmare for bread. I never saw an American paper, never heard a word from this part of the country. It wasn't very popular down there to bring up the United States in general discussion, and anyway I was afraid to show interest in the spot I'd run away from; and finally, if I'd asked all day there was nobody to enlighten me."

He spoke rapidly and at some length of his experiences in the English colony, of his longing for news, and of his dread of seeking it.

"I wasn't the only fellow hiding down there," he assured her. His experiences in the army he touched upon more rapidly, so eager was he to get to the information she deliberately withheld.

"When America got into the war, I volunteered from New Orleans; got there by steamer from Vera Cruz. And I've been shipped from one camp to another up to the date of my discharge. Was in the hospital a little while—injured my game leg, but not seriously. Looked like everybody else was marched off to New

York to take troop ships for Europe, but I was continually finding myself left right there in the spot I was growing on. One thing, though, except for my Liberty Bonds, there was very little to spend money on, and I've saved up enough to pay my board for a long time! And I've been switched from one branch of the service to another till I felt like a little army in myself, my infantry following up my cavalry and my aviator service sailing over my head with my machine gun work blazing away in its nest. Don't know why I was changed. Took a course in French but never got to use it on the natives. *Comprenez vous Francaise?*"

"Oui, Monsieur."

"Virgie, n'avew-vous pas abuse de notre patience?"

"Stop, stop, John, we are having too many courses for our dinner! Say something in English and I'll answer."

"Tell me about the homefolks. It may seem strange, but you do seem just homefolks to me, the only homefolks I ever had, after my mother. You were that to me from the minute you took me in, that golden afternoon when the wind was blowing and the sun was shining and to you it was just March. Why aren't you and your mother living at the old homeplace on the fat of the land? I don't think keeping lodgers agrees with either of you."

"Yes it does. There's some money in it; and with my job as a typewriter down town, we're perfectly independent."

John thought this over briefly, then said, "I was right; Mr. Warring is dead."

"Yes."

"When—" he caught his breath, and she saw him brush his eyes secretly. Finding him-

self detected, he smiled tremulously. "Do you know, Virgie, I didn't dream that I should have cared so much. Well, I do. When—did it happen?"

"Less than a week after you left us."

"I like your expressing it that way. 'Left us' sounds so respectable. Did he get better and then worse?"

"No, never any better. He never knew about you—that you were not—you know what I mean."

"I certainly do, Virgie."

"He was too low even to miss you. He thought you were still with us. Lucia held his hand at the last; but I don't think he knew. He passed away in his sleep."

He leaned over the table to ask, guardedly, "Did you ever hear—did Lucia tell you about what I told her just before I went away? I mean—that little bottle . . ."

Virgie whispered, "Yes," and looked at him intently.

His voice grew stronger in sudden protest: "But didn't anybody do anything about it?"

"She told the doctor, but he refused to take it seriously. She told Eugene Ware because you had referred her to him."

"Well—he seemed a man of sense, whatever else—"

"Eugene was very nice about it."

"Nice!" he echoed scornfully. "Nice, in a matter of life-or-death!"

"I mean—he treated Lucia all right; but the trouble was he—he—"

"Didn't believe it. Well, that was natural enough. But poor Mr. Warring! I could have saved him—if only they had believed in me."

"But Lucia believed in you, and when she found that Eugene would do nothing she de-

terminated to watch at the door and save him. But Eugene had spoken to Mr. Glaxton about it and never once could Lucia catch him off his guard. He pretended not to know why she was in the hall at midnight. And then Mr. Warring died."

"Didn't that make people ask questions?"

"No—it had been expected for days. And besides, other things came up to stir the whole town. Changes come so quickly; and after they come, it is hard to take back one's mind to old conditions."

"Changes? What changes? Oh—you mean Lucia and Eugene?"

"No, I mean the home was broken up. Do you remember my telling you once that Mr. Glaxton had discovered a secret that gave him a hold on me?"

"I remember that everybody had a secret. Yes, I remember about yours."

"It was on account of what he had found out that he could force me to tell about—about your having been in Alice's house on Troost."

"I remember. I wish I could think myself as polite in private life as the papers represented me as a burglar!"

"My secret was this—" Virgie pushed back her plate in the stress of the moment, then began eating again because the savory food he had ordered was irresistible. "Listen, John: when Mr. Warring, that good, good man, out of a sentiment for old times and from gratitude for being taken care of in his orphanhood hunted up my mother—his foster-sister—I was too little to know what my mother found at once. It was this: Lucia wasn't Mr. Warring's daughter."

John shook his head. "I don't seem to get it, Virgie; try again."

"After his son was kidnapped, he and his wife adopted a baby-girl, meaning to raise it as their very own."

She paused for breath, but John, staring at her with pale face, offered no comment.

"It was only later that I found out the truth. That was the secret Mr. Glaxton forced from me, how, I hardly know. I was afraid to let mother find out I'd told him; afraid and ashamed. And he promised to keep the secret, except at such times as he threatened me with it. Oh, it was a horrible situation. Whenever I thought of it, I was in a nightmare. I had that to dread day and night; that the one Lucia revered as her father was really not related to her . . ." She broke off confusedly.

"So!" John muttered at last. "Neither Lucia nor I . . . Poor Mr. Warring!"

"Mr. Glaxton could make me tell anything by holding that over my head. That's how he learned about you. It was for Lucia's sake that I broke the promise. Do you remember I said if you knew why I told, you'd think I did right?"

"And you were quite right, Virgie. I'm sure you wouldn't have told from any other reason. dear Virgie. And anyway, it doesn't matter about me any more. That came before the War and belongs to another age. Poor Mr. Warring, lying there at the mercy of a devil with no child of his own! I'm thankful he believed in me to the last. Instead of doing him harm, after all I must have given him a little comfort.

"But poor Lucia! I see everything. Glaxton, as nearest of kin, has come into the property. I suppose there had never been a legal adoption?"

"Nothing of the sort. And he always put off making a will. He meant to; but you see he was afraid the moment he did, the secret of her parentage would get out."

"So Glaxton turned all of you out of the house!" His teeth clenched ominously.

She nodded. "Now you understand why mother and I are glad to be as well situated as we are."

"Virgie, it's great! Nothing like living on your own, after all. As soon as possible I mean to settle down to good steady work and maybe some day, when I'm forgotten by the rest of the world, we may all live in the same block. That would be fine, wouldn't it! All living in the same block. . . . Well, I suppose Eugene Ware is still an intimate friend of Glaxton's?"

"I suppose so."

"Don't see how Lucia can expect happiness in an arrangement of that sort."

"But it's nothing to her," Virgie said with a sudden grin that left him blank with amazement.

He protested, "It can't help being something to her, the kind of person Glaxton is, and the way he's treated all of you, for him to be an intimate friend of her—" he swallowed to make the word come easier—her husband."

Virgie's grin became so broad that she would have seemed remarkably ugly if he had not suddenly found her beautiful. "Her husband!" she mocked.

John started up from the table, making the dishes rattle. "Isn't he?" he called loudly, heedless of deprecatory glances from neighboring tables.

"Don't go over the top, John; stay with me

in the trenches." He subsided limply. "Nobody is her husband."

"Look here, Virgie, when we met, I'm afraid I didn't let you see how glad I was—let's shake hands all over again."

"No, I'm hungry still; and people are watching us. And besides, I'm not the one you want to shake hands with."

"Where is that girl I want to shake hands with?—at your mother's? If we've finished dinner—"

"But we haven't. I haven't been fed in as many branches of the service as you, and my appetite is still young and inquisitive. And Lucia is not in Kansas City. She lives in a small town in Kansas not far from Ottawa."

"Kansas! And to think that I was in a cantonment there! What is she doing in Kansas? Can it be that Claxton has turned her out of her house without a competency?"

"Like mother and myself she is working for a living. After they dismissed Brother Tredmill from his church—"

"Dismissed! And he worked for those people like a slave!"

"Maybe that's why they thought no more of him. After he was dismissed he went to the little town in Kansas; soon after, he and Alice Klade were married; and Lucia is boarding with them. They'd be glad to have her as a guest, but you know how proud Lucia is."

"I guess I do."

"So Lucia teaches school and during her holidays spends half her time with us."

John stared at the opposite wall, hearing nothing of the sounds and seeing nothing of the changing sights of the restaurant-scene in which his part seemed oddly unreal. At last he turned brusquely toward the other:

"What did you think of me when you learned I'd been playing the imposter? What did Aunt Hildegarde—Mrs. Abbottsfield—say? How did Lucia feel? I can imagine Glaxton trumpeting the news at the breakfast-table; and the search for me with the police—finding the letters and photographs in a corner of my room, and Mr. Warring too weak to be questioned about his old trunk."

"I can tell you exactly how I felt," Virgie said; "as if the ground had melted away and I was falling with no idea of the distance I'd have to drop. As to mother she just kept repeating hysterically that she never had believed you looked like the picture on the wall. Alice regarded it as a dreadful practical joke of her Polite Burglar. But Lucia had nothing to say. She kept to her room and bed to avoid us all."

John asked anxiously, "Was she really ill?"

"What does it matter? She's well now. All that, as you say, was before the war. It was Brother Tredmill who made me see things in their true light. He said you'd pretended to be John Lyle Warring not for gain or adventure, but to save yourself. Of course it was at our expense, but I forgave you. I just couldn't blame you, John. You merited a great deal of blame but there wasn't anybody to administer it. The more Mr. Glaxton raved, the gladder we were you'd escaped. The trouble was we just thought too much of you! And I can't blame you even now. When you give one of your smiles, the world lights up and everything's all right. Oh, that smile of yours is an awful responsibility! If you don't live up to it, it ought to be canned."

"Virgie, I was born with it and can't help myself, but I'm going to try to use it fairly. Do

you think Lucia has really forgiven me? Do you think she'd receive me if I went to that little town in Kansas not far from Ottawa?"

"You see how glad I am to meet you once more. Well, Lucia also is human."

"Virgie, you're an angel!"

She smiled grimly. "Oh, is that what you mean? And Lucia is a woman! I appreciate the difference. All right, John, I trust I know my place. What do you mean to do—after my appetite is appeased?"

"Go straight to Kansas. Well, no, not exactly straight." He took up his knife and fork only to lay them aside. "Is Glaxton living in that house in Lagville?"

"He and Simmons have it to themselves."

"And poor Lucia working herself to death!" he groaned. "Teaching school! How dreadful!"

"John, how can you say that? There's nothing so good as being independent, and 'living on your own.'"

His face was grim. "I'd think the town-people would rise up. The very stones should cry out!" Then shortly: "Has he altered the house—or garden?"

She shook her head.

Then he told her his plan. On leaving Lagville he had written to the Rev. Harry Tredmill, inclosing a sealed note to Mr. Warring with instructions that it should either be delivered into Mr. Warring's hand by the minister, or destroyed. It could not have been delivered. In that sealed envelope had been explicit directions for finding the new hiding-place of the money-box. The secret was still John's alone. He meant to go to Lagville, dig up the treasure and take it to Lucia. At least that much of the Warring property should be

hers. By no moral right could it be diverted to Glaxton's uses. Of course John would be obliged to disguise himself and work in secret. If he were discovered digging in the garden, or carrying away the box of banknotes. . . .

CHAPTER XXX

THE HIDDEN MONEY-BOX

It was a cloudy, moonless night when John pulled up the river from the town where he had procured the skiff—a small collection of scattered houses about two miles below Lagville. He had chosen this means of returning to the scene of his happiest days in order to avoid attracting attention and have the advantage of the current should his departure become a flight for liberty.

When the dark masses of trees thinned away and the lights of the village peeped at him beyond the bottomlands, memories grew more vivid than the living world. They threatened to get between his eyes and what he had to do, for, gazing upstream he saw the bluff towering above the level dark, and seemed to find on its jutting rock the shining figure of Lucia.

The hour was too critical, however, not to call for his keenest perceptions and the swiftest play of his wits and he resolutely banished from mind all but the one thing in prospect: the recovery of the box of banknotes.

Out of the rush of the current he found a little cove where weeping willows dipped their myriad fingers in the water and here he tied up. After scrambling up the steep bank he waited under the trees till it was nearly twelve o'clock, hearing nothing but the murmur of the river and the occasional barking of dogs with now and then some indistinguishable sound from the sleeping village.

When he reached Lagville—which for only

a few weeks had known the passing of his feet, but for three years had been the setting of his fondest dreams—how dear to him was every brick of the humblest walls, every plank of the rattling sidewalks! The trees that lined the streets on either hand sighed in the warm wind for the summers that were spent, and John sighed with them, thinking that days could never come like the days that were gone.

As he passed under a street arc-light, echoes rang along the shopfronts, clapping sounds, startling as pistol shots produced merely by the approach of a single figure. John hastened toward the pedestrian in order to get the light at his back. Nearer, he recognized Eugene Ware.

Ware, knowing street-passers in Lagville at so late an hour were extremely rare, stared curiously at John, seeing only a fellow dressed as a day-laborer with a spade over his shoulder. He uttered a perfunctory greeting which was returned with gruff indistinctness.

John's first thrill of suspense was gone, but he turned off at the first corner to make his way toward the residential district, leaving Ware well on his way to his hotel lodgings.

When the Warring residence came in sight he would not permit himself to dwell on the day of his first arrival, a fugitive adventurer; and after he had climbed the side-fence into the garden he resisted the desire to linger for a time in the summer house where Lucia and he had talked for the last time at just such an hour of the night.

Moving with infinite caution—for a light was burning its warning from the sitting-room—he crept to the shrubbery in which he had left the box of banknotes safely buried. Naturally he was tormented by doubts and fears.

Of course Glaxton had secured the secret key hidden behind the landscape painting, and Mr. Warring had explained its purpose. The lawyer was sure that John had dug up the box from under the summerhouse floor and disposed of it. Glaxton had argued that the reason for Simmons' dismissal on the night of Mr. Warring's journey had been for the purpose of giving John a free field. Had he suspected that the box remained on the premises? In that case, he and Simmons must have dug in the garden from one end to the other.

Although it was quite dark, John did not hesitate, except to avoid making a noise as he pushed his way through the thorny brambles to the center of the clump of bushes. He began to dig very gently, while the rushing murmur of the wind in trees and undergrowth filled his ears. The steady light from the downstairs window watched like a relentless eye. It seemed to him a long time, though it was not long, before the blade of his spade smote against a metallic surface. At the contact there came a wrenching of his nerves as if the iron had struck into his flesh. The box was there. Had it rested undisturbed for three years in its place, or had Glaxton found and emptied it, and left it in mockery?

He drew it from the hole, brushed away the dirt and tried to test it in his anxious hand. It seemed as heavy as it had been. No—yes. Certainly it was not empty. And not certainly, either, for the metal was heavy. And paper of no value might have been substituted for the fifty thousand dollars. The desire was almost irresistible to force open the box with the edge of the spade and make sure of his success or failure. But he checked the impulse. How could he know that somebody

was not in the garden at this moment—possibly sitting in the summerhouse? And that warning light told him that the household was not asleep. If any one should surprise him in the shrubbery kneeling over the box with the banknotes lying in counted piles upon the ground—How cold and hard seemed to him the light glaring from across the lawn!

He weighed the box first in one hand then in the other and decided it was lighter than when he drew it from Mr. Warring's trunk. After all, there was only one thing to do, and to delay in carrying away the box might involve him in irreparable trouble. While drifting down the river in his boat he could examine its contents in reasonable security.

He thrust the spade well under the shrubbery, thinking he could have no further use of it, and was feeling his way to the open ground, still, however, with undiminished caution, when the front door of the house was thrown open and two men stepped out upon the porch. For a moment the hall-light was full upon them; they were men each in his way so individual that John even at that distance had no difficulty in recognizing Glaxton with his dark smile, immensely at his ease, and Blearstead, his features writhing and twisting in the stress of passion.

They turned for a moment before coming out upon the lawn and their faces were brightly illuminated. To John, the man of refinement was the more contemptible. In his criminal nature was a loathsome calculation unknown to the brutal highwayman. Blearstead could not have disguised his enmity long enough to overcome an enemy by guile. He could take a life to save his own or to gratify a blind spasm of rage, but he could not com-

mit murder with the bloodless deliberation John believed Glaxton had exercised toward his benefactor. He recalled Glaxton's dark malignancy while dropping the secret drug—surely it was poison—into the invalid's night-glass. Thinking of that night, Glaxton's smiling countenance now oppressed him with the sickness of strong revulsion. The very handsomeness of his face and delicate grace of his movements caused him instinctively to press back among the bushes as from something unclean.

Glaxton, followed sullenly by Blearstead, led the way across the lawn to the garden. John heard his contemptuous bidding—

"Finish what you have to say out here. You are so noisy the servants will think the house full of bandits."

John reached stealthily for the spade that he might, in case of need, have a silent weapon of defense.

Though of the two men the lawyer was the more despicable, Blearstead was by far the more dangerously violent and John wondered at the lawyer's temerity in wantonly provoking him, attributing it to a singular lack of perception in one who had always appeared astute.

"I don't care who hears me," Blearstead ejaculated with the loud blustering John knew so well. "This thing has got to come to a point, Glaxton. I've been to your house as often as I want to come."

"A good deal often than my wishes," remarked the other.

"And it ain't safe for me, either. I tell you, this has got to end."

"I agree most heartily."

"And after I get here you put me off and

put me off—I hardly know how. But when I get back home and think it over, I see all your dope isn't nothing but wind. Bring it to a point, Glaxton."

"I'll do it, my man; I'll end it for you right now."

"But for me," Blearstead rumbled on, too cumbrous and self-centered to notice the other's words or manner, "you'd be out of all this—I mean, your house, your lands, your money. What would you a-got if it hadn't been me told you John was not a Warring? This property would a-gone to him, and him and me would have shared it together."

"He refused to share with you," Glaxton said lightly. "That's why you took me in as your partner; because he wouldn't play your game."

"You'd never once a-guessed that he wasn't Warring's flesh-and-blood heir. It was me made you wise to them facts. Of course you was stealing all you could up to then, but you couldn't have gobbled up the whole million without me. And I'm going to have my share!"

"I've given you more than you deserved. After all, what did you do but tell the truth? And, if it comes to that, what was the truth?—that you patched up a rascally plan with your nephew and gave him the baby-clothes that belonged to a dead child. As for your claim that the nursemaid drowned the infant, and that you got the suitcase from your brother, I've no doubt that you yourself were the kidnapper, and that you, not the nursery maid, killed the helpless innocent. No, you've been paid all you're going to get. The fact is, I ought to put you behind the bars where you belong. Just go ahead and tell the authori-

ties how you and Cleek cooked up that conspiracy, and see what happens to you! Yes, I'll bring things to a point. This ends it, my friend."

Blearstead uttered a furious oath. "You think I can't do anything to you. That's where you're wrong, Edgar Glaxton. I can do something to you, all right, and I'm going to do it right now."

John, familiar with all of Blearstead's moods, was thrilled by the conviction that Glaxton's last hour had struck. But he remained perfectly motionless, not so much for concealment as to let justice take its course.

"Get off my grounds," Glaxton said scornfully. "What have I to fear from a coward like you? Miserable creature, you wouldn't dare lift your coarse hand against one so much better than you. Dust of my feet, leave the place at once before I drag you to the ditch." He laughed maddeningly. "You poor braggart! There is so much of you that you look like a man; but in body and spirit you're nothing but a beast."

Blearstead gave a mad bellow as if to corroborate this description and bent his head to rush furiously forward. But at the same moment a club from behind descended upon his head with a sickening thud.

John had been too much engrossed in waiting for Glaxton's downfall to observe a tall, thin form slip from the greater darkness of the summerhouse.

"Beat him up, Simmons," said Glaxton with a cruel laugh, "but be sure not to kill him."

John now understood that Glaxton had goaded the man to fury in order to make him insensible to Simmons' approach.

"Drag him to the summerhouse," Glaxton

went on coolly, "and tie him so he can't move. But there's no use to gag him—no danger of the fellow's calling for help. I'd sit in there with him to make sure of his entertainment, but I find his nearness distasteful to me. When he's secured, go for the sheriff as we planned yesterday, but I wouldn't be in too great a hurry. He might as well have a quiet half-hour to meditate on the nice home the State is going to give him for a good many years. I'll go to the house and smoke a cigar—is he hearing me?"

"Yes, sir, he's at himself."

"I'll smoke a good cigar and look over my papers—the deeds to my property, the title to this estate, the mortgages on nearby farms. I wish I could have satisfied the fellow, but the more he has, the more he wants. Simmons, I was so delighted when the creature told me John Walters was an imposter that out of my impulsiveness— And I'm not naturally impulsive, am I, Simmons?"

"I don't know exactly what that is, sir, but I don't expect you are, sir."

"I should have had him thrown in jail then and there," Glaxton mused regretfully, "but I was so grateful for the news that I weakened. Let this be a lesson to you, Simmons: never let your gratitude get the better of your judgment."

"Yes, sir; thank you, sir."

Blearstead made a movement to rise and the club descended mercilessly. He fell back with a heavy groan.

"Now," Simmons snarled, "will you lie quiet?"

In spite of the injury done him, John's indignation was stirred hotly. "After all," he

thought, "he is my uncle—and Glaxton is a murderer."

"Don't kill him, Simmons," Glaxton said, strolling toward the house. "A corpse is one of the most awkward mementoes to dispose of you ever saw."

In the dense gloom, Simmons muttered, "I'll beat you within an inch of your life if you give me any more trouble." He began dragging the huge form toward the summer-house.

Apparently Blearstead was passive in his hands for no sound of blows came to John and presently he saw Simmons slinking away in the direction of town. He had gone for the sheriff. Glaxton was already in the house and a shade had been dropped over the light at the window; he was overlooking his papers. The garden-silence was undisturbed.

After the briefest interval of caution, John, with the tin box safe in his bosom, slipped to the summerhouse and explored in the darkness for the body of his uncle. Blearstead was secured by arms and legs to an upright in the wall of the structure. He did not move or utter a sound, thinking, no doubt, that Simmons had returned to gloat over his helplessness.

"Know my voice?" John whispered. Blearstead quivered from head to foot, fearfully shaken by recognition of his deliverer. "Don't be afraid," John added, meantime severing the bandages; "there was a time when I thought that if I could get you tied up as you are now, it would start my millennium. But somehow, now that the thing has happened to you, it makes my blood boil. You have done everything in your power to destroy me, but the power simply wasn't yours to finish the

job. Then you tried to sell me into bondage, but Joseph wouldn't stay in the pit. After all, you aren't not the meanest man on earth; you'll have to give the blue ribbon to Glaxton and just wear the red. And besides, you are mother's brother. And there you are, free. And not much time to lose! Can you walk? I'm afraid you're pretty badly beaten up. Lean on me."

Blairstead grunted hoarsely. "Do you mean it, kid?"

"Just like that."

To Blairstead, the thing was incomprehensible but he recognized sincerity in the other's voice and made no delay in taking advantage of the opportunity.

He leaned on the proffered arm, and limped out into the garden, choking back a groan. "Where are you going, boy?"

"Where you are not. I'm getting you off free, but I'm under no delusions about you, uncle. You'll have to travel alone."

"Guess I can make it," the big fellow muttered with a plaintive quality in his voice which struck John as grotesquely pathetic as if, for all his bulk and long career of evil-doing, he was after all but an overgrown boy. "Kid, you'll never be sorry for this."

John said cheerfully, "I know you'd sell me out tomorrow if you had the chance, but I'm counting on the same Old Mrs. Luck that rocked my cradle to keep me from putting your gratitude to the test. Careful over this fence—better throw more weight on me, I've been soldiering and know how to bear up. Give my regards to Bettie. And tell her father and Cleek that if famine gets in the land and they have to come down into Egypt for corn, ask for Pharaoh's right-hand man and see what he

has for 'em. Do you get that Biblical line, uncle?"

Blearstead gave a hoarse sound not to be definitely classified. After they had reached the end of the street he said, "I'm afraid I'm pretty badly in, John. But if anything could have braced me up, you'd a-done it!"

"Look here," John suddenly determined, "I'm going to give you a sure way of getting away. I came in a boat, and I'll skip out the best way I can. I'm tough and young and the boat is yours. I'll get you to the river before Glaxton has half finished his cigar."

CHAPTER XXXI

LUCIA ON THE WAGON-BRIDGE

Having learned from Tredmill exactly when Lucia was accustomed, on her return from teaching school, to cross the wagon-bridge in the maple grove, John posted himself there about four o'clock in the afternoon and at last had the joy of seeing her dear form swinging along the country road.

Though the grove touched the border of the little Kansas town, it wore an air of singular remoteness, where somehow the singing of birds sounded louder than the hammering on an anvil and the sawing of wood that came from not distant streets. Through the branches could be seen a red blur which on closer inspection proved a brick church, while high up among the birdnests a pool of water shining in the light and seemingly caught in the crotch of a tree—that was some distant window in the east, answering back the taunting sun. But despite these glimpses and the calling of children at play, John felt that Lucia was entering into an island solitude to share with him its May loveliness.

She looked tired yet he knew it was less than a mile from her county school to lodgings at the minister's. Doubtless there were troublesome pupils under her care—was there ever a district school that had not among its number at least one child to embitter the flavor of the day's work? And of course the close of school never finds a teacher with the springiness of nerves that react to the first months of mental labor.

His heart yearned over the tired girl. Of course there was comfort in the thought that vacation days were at hand, but it was now that her limbs moved languidly, now that her face showed pallor beneath the bright tresses and now that he had loved her as he had never loved before, and realized as never before how she had been beaten to earth by his betrayal of her trust.

Lucia was startled at sight of a soldier on the bridge. She had seen kahki everywhere else without once looking for John in the uniform, but now, oddly enough, the waiting figure caused her to think of Lagville. She no longer looked for John. At first she had been terribly afraid lest Glaxton should find him, later had despaired of any one finding him. He might be dead. If living, how could he dare Glaxton's remorseless enmity by showing himself? And certainly he could not be standing there on the bridge watching her as if she were a broken fragment of his heart that needed only being fitted back to make his being complete.

Then all at once like the rushing of a warm wind across the earth that late frosts have chilled came the certitude that once at least in life the brightest dream is not too bright to come true; and her face showed gladness like the glow of a perfect rose after the dash of summer rain has passed.

He hardly knew how he had expected to be received; apologetic phrases, sentences of eager deprecation and excuse had floated vaguely in his mind. Whatever might be said in his defense, the truth remained that he had not scrupled to deceive her in the intimacy of the home. Yet she looked glad.

"Lucia—the imposter has come."

"I was an imposter too," she flashed, her hand in his.

"Yes—but you believed yourself to be his daughter; and I knew."

"You were as much kin to him as I," she insisted. All his forebodings had been needless. She was just glad. It was worth much—it was worth everything to have a friend like Lucia! He had withheld confidences, he had been obliged to let the years slip by, but the Lucia of his farewell and the Lucia of his greeting was the same girl.

"Virgie told me," he stammered, hardly conscious of his words, so amazing was the wonder of her unchangeableness. "That's what brings me back. You've lost everything. Oh, Lucia, you are so thin! She told me about that school. It gave me the courage to come to you. How could I stay away? May I stay now?"

She leaned against the bridge's huge inverted "V" and looked at him fixedly, whispering, "But you wouldn't dare."

"Why not?—now that Glaxton has everything? He'd commit any crime for property, but I'm not in his way. He's a miser. He wouldn't spend his money to run down a man not in his way. I don't believe he knows what genuine hatred is; he's just a mountain of self-interest. We're exactly where he wants us—out of the house that is yours by right. As long as he is left in peace to enjoy the fruits of his murder—it comes to that—I have nothing to fear. If you had your rights, there in Lagville, or if we hadn't learned the facts about your parentage, oh, Lucia, you'd never have seen me again!"

She looked over the railing with her gaze on the slender stream trickling over its shelv-

ing bed. "Why?" she murmured protestingly.

"But I was the imposter! You, the heiress could have had nothing to do with a homeless wanderer, a false claimant." There was silence between them while the stream laughed over the ledges. Then he exclaimed, "Now that you have been robbed of everything that makes life easy I have come; and I can tell you what couldn't be told in your home—I mean, about my love—"

There was a breathless pause, then Lucia raised her head to look at him while blushes dyed her cheeks. And he saw the answer to the question still struggling in his heart. The stream laughed musically over the tiny waterfalls and bubbled away to green meadows. The occupants of the desert island were in each other's arms.

"Oh, John," she murmured, "you are so noble!"

"Noble?" He was bewildered.

"Yes." She looked up at him, then dropped her eyes, then again let him see the glory of her love shining in her sky of blue. "You never took advantage of my ignorance, not once. I thought sisters felt as I felt; and I am so proud of you—it makes me know how fully you are to be trusted that not once—no, not once—"

Then he did. Many times.

They walked up and down the bridge exactly as if there were no road across it to somewhere. Sometimes they paused to lean over the railing; it was like magic to see their two faces in the water desolve into a composite picture. Nobody came. How kind fate can sometimes be! Is it to disarm us that we may forget how keen may fall her thrust?

The wagon-bridge seemed built for two pairs of feet that had nowhere to go.

How much there was to be said—how many reminiscences, how many plans! And how many times must be repeated the wonder of their happiness, the pledge of their future! Of course they had their dreams to exchange.

"I can't help hoping," he said, "that your father—no, I'll call him our father, since he belongs equally to us both—that our father made a will after all, and some day it will be unearthed, and you'll have everything."

"Mr. Glaxton would destroy it."

"It might be hidden away in a strong box at the bank," John protested.

"Father—our father—wouldn't have dared hide it in the bank, because Mr. Glaxton knew all his business there. If there was a will it might be—" she smiled at the conceit—"buried in the garden, let us say, at dead of night, in some secret spot."

"Lucia," he exclaimed, "you're half a witch. You've almost surprised my great secret. I reached town today at an early hour and kept out of sight till you had left for school. Then I descended upon Brother Tredmill and Alice with a certain box that your father and I hid as you described. There wasn't a will in it; we may find a will later. I hope so. But the box wasn't empty. At Brother Tredmill's advice, I deposited its contents in an Ottawa bank, getting back about an hour ago."

He handed her a deposit slip.

"But what does it mean?" she gasped.
"John, what *does* it mean?"

"It means, darling Lucia, that we are not going to teach school a great deal. And I don't think Virgie will wear out her fingers at

a typewriter. Oh, it means a thousand things! For one thing, we are to be absolutely happy. Lucia, it isn't every love story that ends with fifty thousand dollars!"

CHAPTER XXXII

BY WAY OF POST-SCRIPT

The world had forgotten John and Lucia—happy John and Lucia! Interest in individuals no matter how picturesque had been engulfed in deeper absorption in international affairs.

Even in Lagville, people, grown accustomed to seeing Glaxton moving about the Warring yard and garden and looking from the Warring doors and windows, allowed the story of the bold imposter to fade from mind. If there had been whispers of tamperings with mortgages, of the stretching of power of attorney, of designs upon a defenseless old man, they were heard no more.

Pity for the adopted daughter whose adoption had not been legalized persisted, but only among those who disliked the usurper. And this pity, warm and sincere as in some cases it was, led to no act looking toward Lucia's relief. One did not know what had become of her except, vaguely, that she "was living with Alice," and was obliged to work for a living.

She had been such a sweet girl. unspoiled by wealth or position, full of cheerful sprightliness, kindly, compassionate. Having everything, she had not reminded you by so much as an air that you were a poor scrubby wretch dodging and racing along on borrowed capital. And now stripped of all that had made up her life, it really seemed that something should be done to give her a footing in the world of work and disillusionment.

But of course one did nothing; one had one's own troubles, one's own self to take care of. Besides, there was the preacher who had been dismissed because nothing could keep him from stirring to the light town evils instead of leaving the sediment at the bottom of casual affairs—he and his bride, if what one heard was true, had opened their doors to the dispossessed.

Some sympathy Lucia had forfeited by her treatment of Eugene Ware. He was related to almost every family in Lagville that mattered. Poor Eugene! He was married now, married to a girl of very little money but with what everybody agreed to be a good complexion. She would never have anything like that which Lucia should have inherited,—or even was born with; for when in speaking of her looks complexion was said, all was said. And it was not as if Eugene had refused to give Lucia a last chance. Even after it appeared that Glaxton would get everything, he had renewed his offer of marriage. That she should refuse him then had seemed preposterous. What did she expect?

Eugene Ware had been treated badly, and naturally his relatives never thought of Lucia without thinking of that. It would not be fair to any of these to say that in Lagville there was rejoicing over the downfall of the heiress; but since destiny had seen to her punishment without asking assistance, it did a good deal to reconcile one to the meager bank account that came with that complexion.

In the meantime, John and Lucia were married. They had not waited one day after the closing of the district school. Why should they with fifty thousand dollars in the bank

and their hearts full of love? Few lovers have waited so long!

The ceremony was as quiet as possible. Though convinced that Glaxton would not again try to run him down, there is nothing to be gained in tempting the devil to do his worst. Tredmill performed the ceremony with zest sufficient to indicate that a similar occasion had left him undismayed though then he enacted one of the leading roles. Immediately after the ceremony the bridal pair left for Mexico without rice.

John hoped beyond the border to take up some of the threads torn from his hands by the War and, after all, it was possible that his wife, in spite of the obscurity of the little Kansas town, might have attracted dangerous attention from which the mountains would offer safe retreat.

Several months after the wedding, the Rev. Tredmill received the following letter from the Lagville sheriff:

"Dear Brother Tredmill:

"It is very important, as the inclosure will show you, to find out as soon as possible what has become of John Walters. We have sent out tracers in every direction and are hoping that you know something of his whereabouts for I remember he was one of your friends during the church trouble. I hope you got a good job where you are and everything pleasant. I voted against you as you know, but it was to keep peace. We haven't any preacher now but we are united. And please tell me what you can about John Walters. Wire his address. Of course you read in the papers about Glaxton getting shot through the heart and dying on the spot, and how Simmons winged his attacker. The fellow that killed Glaxton and

got shot by Simmons to death's door is named Blearstead. The inclosure is Blearstead's dying statement, I mean, a copy of the same. Wire me if you can shed any light on John Walters' hiding-out place."

As Tredmill had not heard of the Lagville tragedy he was intensely excited and called Alice to read with him the typewritten document claiming to be a copy of the original manuscript in the office of the prosecuting attorney:

"Jim Blearstead now at point of death from a bullet fired by Simmons to avenge the death of Glaxton at Blearstead's hands, asks me, Bob Plackett, sheriff of Lagville County of the State of Missouri, in the presence of the witnesses signed below, to take down his dying statement made in due form by his own free will at his request, under oath, as follows, to-wit:

"John Walters thinks I'm his uncle which right there he has another guess coming. He thinks the woman who raised him from a baby was his mother and a sister of me, wrong again. That woman was the nursemaid at Warring's when his baby was abducted, and her and me is who done it, us no kin but working together for the dough we never got. I never meant no real harm. We was going to squeeze the old man for what juice there was in him, then hand back the kid as safe as a safety-pin. But the cops butted in and it was a scream whether the kid or us was going to be up in the air. It got so hot for us that I decided to throw the kid in the river for I dasn't be found with him about, so there simply wasn't nothing else to be done as you can see for yourself though hating it like the devil for if there's anybody got a heart it's Blearstead. Nothing vicious

or low about me. But Lizzie White—that's the maid—disappeared with the kid; sloped in order to save his life, for give him back she couldn't without putting her neck in the pen. Or the noose. She'd a-restored him if she'd dared. She was that weak. As weak a woman to tackle an iron-hard job like that I never met or hope to. But listen to me talking about hoping to meet anybody! I know my checks are all in with my balance in red. It's just a habit a fellow has of saying things. If I could have another chance I'd show you a different man before I died. But what's the use? I never found a trace to Lizzie White till three years ago when she was living in Kansas City calling herself Ann Walters. I claimed her as my sister Ann and she couldn't kick out of the traces for I had the goods on her. But she didn't live an awful long time after that. What I wanted wasn't to harm her which I didn't, but to work the boy for the heir-scheme; which I done. I found her taking in all kinds of hand-work, bound and determined to make a gentleman out of the boy for to ease her conscience. She couldn't give him back to his dad though she 'lowed to leave a letter telling all, on her death. I ain't saying she changed her mind, but maybe I done away with the letter. Anyway she killed herself making John a gentleman which he was by nature; as I may say, if you can get me, it was blowed in the bottle. I saw she was wasting away to fatten her conscience and I tried to show her how she was wrong, and that life is give us for living. It wasn't no use, she died, and the boy wouldn't take to my line of business. I got a strangle-holt on him by putting him in a bad light and then, to get shed of the cops, he consented to pretend to be what

he was all along, you know: Warring's son. But he wouldn't divvy up with me on the old man's spuds, so I tried to wring it out of Glaxton. He couldn't be wrung and that's why I done for *him*, and glad of it, he deserved no less. I got to tell you that there was one time when Glaxton would of doused my glim if it hadn't been for John. He cut the ropes and right on top of my giving him away, so I told him he'd never be sorry for it and I bet you he never ain't. This here statement will show him what I meant by them words though if he hadn't shown me that good streak when I needed it, I'd have caved in with all this unsaid and it would have been good-night for him. But this will put him on Easy Street and whenever he thinks of me he can't help but know that there was some good in me after all and if I'd had half a chance I'd a-made good yet. But the doctor says it's no use. And I feel it coming on, like a cold river rolling up about my neck. If I could have had another chance—there's a good deal in me you can't see, but I know it's there. And John'll know it. And let him be told that every word I speak now is cutting me like a knife. There was a lot of good in Blearstead, but I wouldn't let it come out; I seemed ashamed of it, somehow; I'm awful proud of every good bit of me now, captain! If I could live, I'd let the good come out and if there's a God let Him take due notice and act according. If proofs of what I'm a-telling are wanting, well, a man about to die ain't liable to hand out a cooked-up story, is he? However that may be, there's a family living in a houseboat named Hode. Mrs. Hode got the whole story from the nursemaid, but her man, Tacky Hode, won't let her tell it, because he's laying to make something

out of the secret. But they got a girl, and a good straight one, named Bettie. She got the story from her ma. John will know how to find them. Of course nobody would a-paid any attention to them spouting out this history on their own hook, but put my dying words alongside and we have what we call testimony, what? Also a pugilist named Cleek living in Smiling Lane; I've done told him the whole story. Ask him. Now that's all. I'm Jim Blearstead and I'm glad I killed him. I wish I had done more good acts in my life, but I hope this will count pretty high. As to that scum Simmons, as I wasn't making any attack on him, and had but the kindest feelings for him apart from the way he served me one night, what he done was cold-blooded murder and I hope he gets all that's a-coming to him.

“Signed, Jim Blearstead.

“We the undersigned being present while Jim Blearstead dictated the above, and being duly sworn, testify that the foregoing is a full and exact and literal reproduction of the dying statement of the said Jim Blearstead.

“Hiram Dudley,

“Whitsett Dobbs,

“Eugene Ware.”

In a storm of tempestuous joy Alice and the Rev. Harry Tredmill caught each other about the neck. You would have thought that through the discovery of a Warring will, the Warring fortune was coming to them!

“I must wire the sheriff at once.” Tredmill took several steps which from any one but a minister must have suggested the idea of dancing. “And I must wire him—John Walters—no, John Lyle Warring, not an imposter after all, bless his heart! but the original article; the Warring heir, owner of the Lagville

home—and all those farms and properties. . .”

He gave Alice a parting kiss then rushed to find his hat; not the one he wore about the premises, but the carefully preserved hat with only one spot which, by virtue of its prestige derived from journeyings beyond the front gate, was known—only, however, to its owner—as “the new hat.”

Alice kept close upon his footsteps, talking all the time; and when he was in the yard and she knew he must soon be beyond hearing she called her last words with passionate conviction:

“I knew from the first that he looked exactly like the picture on the wall!”

THE END.



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